The Role of Teachers in Implementing Quality Education at the Secondary Level for Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: An Analytical Study Based on Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Background: Quality education is essential for the sustainable development of any country and is a continuous process in which teachers play a central role. Through the proper discharge of their responsibilities, teachers can ensure students' academic achievements, helping them to become humane, socially responsible, and globally competent citizens.

Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to analyze the role that teachers should play, from the perspective of students, in ensuring quality education at the secondary level within the framework of SDG 4 implementation.

Materials and Methods: This was a mixed-method study incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A total of 203 students were selected through random sampling to collect primary data. The data collection tools included structured questionnaires, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, while qualitative data were analyzed manually through coding and categorization. Triangulation methods were used to validate the results.

Results: The findings reveal that teachers play the most crucial role in ensuring quality education at the secondary level. Ethical conduct, a strong sense of responsibility, and professional competence among teachers contribute significantly to achieving quality education in the classroom. However, students reported that the education they currently receive does not meet their expectations of quality.

Conclusions: As teachers are key agents in the implementation of SDG 4, it is imperative that they are adequately equipped to deliver quality education in the classroom. Therefore, the state must take appropriate measures to provide necessary training, support, and structural reforms to ensure effective implementation.

Key word: Teachers, Quality Education, Secondary Level, SDG, Students' Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations adopted a global development agenda for 2030, aiming to build a balanced and inclusive society by ensuring sustainable development worldwide. At the core of achieving this goal lies the role of teachers [1]. Through the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," adopted in 2015, the UN outlined a comprehensive framework for global progress, with one of its primary objectives being to ensure inclusive and quality education, as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]. Within this context, Sustainable Development Goal 4 has been identified as a fundamental target. It aims to ensure that by 2030, all boys and girls have access to free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes [4, 9, 10]. Adegbesan et al. (2010) refer to this as a symbol of "quality education" [11]. According to Brundtland (1988) and Mbakwem (2016), sustainable development is a process that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [12, 13]. Education is a central pillar of sustainable development, not only as the core of Goal 4 but also as a key enabler for achieving several other goals. The United Nations (2015) emphasises

the importance of building an educated and aware population to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs. Special attention is given to ensuring equal access to education for children with disabilities, indigenous populations, and those in vulnerable situations, alongside the creation of inclusive and effective learning environments [14]. O'Brien and Leichenko (2003) argue that to achieve these goals, it is essential to utilise education as a tool to inspire children toward sustainable lifestyles and to bring about behavioural change [15].

The education system in Bangladesh is divided into three levels, with secondary education occupying the second tier. This stage typically serves students aged between 11 and 17, covering grades six through twelve. It acts as a bridge between primary and higher education. According to the 1974 Education Commission Report, this level is considered appropriate for adolescent and post-adolescent learners and plays a significant role in the development of national human resources [16, 17]. Students at this level not only lay the foundation for higher education but also actively contribute to the overall advancement of the national economy [18]. Quality secondary education is essential for sustainable livelihoods, health, and inclusive economic development, as it supports the development of knowledge, skills, and a positive mindset [9]. The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2004, 2005) emphasised the need to balance quality and access in education. It viewed quality not only as the acquisition of knowledge but also as the development of values, creativity, and emotional intelligence [19]. Integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into secondary education fosters students' attitudes of cooperation, democratic awareness, justice, and respect for diversity. The inclusion of ESD in the curriculum leads to a transformative shift in educational practices and helps students develop the skills, perspectives, and values necessary for building a sustainable society [9].

Education is considered a comprehensive process of socialization in human life, contributing significantly to lifelong self-development, empowerment, and human flourishing. According to Hermans et al. (2018), the use of modern educational technologies enhances the quality and effectiveness of teaching. These technologies are not merely tools or techniques; rather, they represent an organized process of planning, implementing, and evaluating education, ensuring behavioural engagement of both teachers and students [20,12]. UNESCO (2005) defines quality education as a dynamic concept that evolves with time and context. The quality of education emphasises not only the intellectual development of learners but also the cultivation of human values [21]. Education is a fundamental right and a key driver in achieving other goals of sustainable development. Quality education plays a vital role in poverty reduction, eliminating inequalities, fostering peaceful societies, and promoting healthy lifestyles. According to UNESCO, education should be given the highest priority as the foundation of sustainable development [11]. Quality is often regarded as a benchmark of excellence, determined through the effectiveness of educational processes and the satisfaction of learners [22]. In contextualising education, connecting students' prior knowledge with abstract thinking is a vital strategy for ensuring quality education. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) contributes to the development of students' sustainable perspectives and values [21]. Quality education encompasses more than just factual knowledge; it fosters worldviews, problem-solving abilities, environmental awareness, and a respectful approach to peace and social justice [23]. To ensure quality education, the implementation of internal quality assessment systems is essential. These systems must conduct evaluations based on specific indicators and outcomes [9]. Quality education is a multidimensional process that includes teaching methods, active student participation, a joyful classroom environment, teacher-student relationships, qualified teachers, safe learning environments, assessment outcomes, teacher training, management, supervision, leadership, curriculum, learning materials, evaluation, education policy and planning, external administration, and financing [24,4,25]. A fundamental prerequisite for quality education is the presence of trained and professionally motivated teachers [12]. In rural areas, teacher shortages, weak infrastructure, and a lack of learning materials negatively affect the quality of education [26]. A quality education system is essential for national development and enhancing the skills of human resources [27]. Governments are under increasing pressure to formulate policies that ensure inclusive and quality education for all [14]. The National Education Policy 2010 and the implementation of reforms aligned with the SDGs, supported by financial assistance from the European Union, highlight the necessity of long-term investment in education. As Whiteley emphasises, investment in education should remain steadfast and even increase to promote values and future development [28].

Despite rapid educational expansion in many countries in pursuit of achieving the "Education for All" goal by 2015, the quality of education in least-developed countries has become questionable due to limited resources [6]. In Bangladesh, progress remains insufficient due to challenges such as a shortage of skilled teachers, lack

of an integrated curriculum, absence of a neutral and safe learning environment, insufficient funding and governance, inadequate sustainable investment for quality education, outdated curricula, weak management, and ineffective assessment systems [25]. To achieve Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), the government must ensure adequate investment in the education sector. It is equally essential to ensure qualified and inspiring teachers for every learner, establish a professionalism-based educational culture, and encourage talented individuals to pursue the teaching profession [12]. Guaranteeing quality education for all requires the government to adopt integrated development planning, increase education budgets, and ensure that each student has access to competent and motivating teachers [29]. In building a "Smart Bangladesh," quality education is fundamental. Educational deprivation among youth would result in irreversible damage to the nation [30].

Teachers play the most critical role in achieving sustainable development, as they are the primary architects of learning environments and ultimately determine the success of education [31]. Both national and international education policies recognize teacher quality as the foundation of education and development, acknowledging teachers as the central driving force of the education system [32]. As key actors in the classroom, teachers influence the pace of student learning, and competent educators can positively impact learning outcomes while helping reduce social inequality [33]. Teachers also identify students' intrinsic strengths and weaknesses and adopt teaching strategies accordingly, which supports individualized learning [34]. In the 21st-century educational context, teachers' professional competencies, classroom management skills, relational leadership, and high expectations significantly affect students' academic performance [4]. The quality of teacher-student relationships directly impacts student engagement, social development, and motivation for learning. Compassionate teacher-student relationships marked by high expectations foster a positive classroom atmosphere, encouraging autonomy and collaborative participation [35]. Considering education as the backbone of development necessitates recognizing teachers' central role. A well-trained teacher promotes peace, justice, and human rights in society by enhancing students' knowledge, values, and awareness. In the era of digital education, teachers proficient in technology can make learning more inclusive and globally oriented [23]. The quality of education primarily depends on skilled teachers, effective teaching strategies and responsive assessment systems, along with manageable class sizes and sufficient instructional time. Within any solid foundational education system, the teacher's role remains pivotal. However, teacher quality hinges on professional knowledge, pedagogical skills, motivation, morale, and enthusiasm for learning. These attributes are directly reflected in student outcomes and are essential for ensuring sustainable education [6, 35].

According to OECD (2005), developing and retaining skilled and quality teachers in the 21st century is a major challenge [35]. To ensure quality in teacher education, it is essential to implement practical and time-relevant pre-service training curricula so that future teachers can develop professional competencies [36]. Professional teaching requires psychological and behavioural readiness, including the capacity to demonstrate tolerance and encouragement toward students. Both pre-service and in-service training contribute to enhancing teachers' professional skills, with assessments including assignments, tests, competitions, and workshops [12]. However, teacher shortages, financial constraints, and infrastructural limitations remain key obstacles to quality education. From a social reconstructionist perspective, it is imperative to restructure teacher training programs [8]. To be an effective teacher, one must possess subject-specific knowledge, an understanding of students' learning styles, and the confidence to respond to the dynamic realities of the classroom [37]. Competent teachers have a positive impact on students' academic performance and play a significant role in bridging the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged learners. They plan lessons based on students' prior knowledge, abilities, and developmental stages, adjusting the curriculum and assessments as necessary to ensure each learner moves toward success [33, 38].

The progress of a nation depends largely on its education system, and the quality of that system is determined by the qualifications and competencies of its teachers. Although it is unreasonable to solely blame teachers for low educational outcomes, their motivation, guidance and access to quality professional development are foundational to building a sustainable and humane society. Despite the growing influence of technology potentially undermining the prestige of the teaching profession, the teacher's role remains indispensable in promoting social justice, value education, environmental awareness, and responsible citizenship [20]. To ensure quality teaching, teacher retraining, technological skills, structural development and a supportive professional environment are prerequisites. The teaching profession must be incentivised through motivation,

dignity, housing benefits, professional development opportunities, and recognition so that teachers can play an effective role in improving educational quality [22, 9]. Teachers are the central driving force behind educational quality. Regardless of how well-developed the curriculum or educational policies may be, their implementation is impossible without teachers. Yet, in reality, there remain significant policy and structural gaps in ensuring the quality of teachers and teacher training systems. According to UNESCO (2004), while the relationship between education and socio-economic development is well established, adequate priority has not been given to ensuring teacher quality [39]. The professional evaluation of teachers plays a critical role in improving the quality of education. Notable evaluation methods include classroom observations, peer evaluation, and self-assessment. Among these, self-assessment is particularly effective for promoting professional reflection and qualitative development among teachers [4].

A qualified teacher is not only defined by professional qualifications but also requires motivation, welfare, and an enabling environment to perform professional duties effectively. Integration of technology, continuous professional development, and ethical commitment play a central role in shaping a competent teacher [40]. In the modern era, teaching is considered a multidimensional profession where teachers must coordinate not only with the curriculum but also with students, parents, social and economic challenges, and policy frameworks. Consequently, the complexity and professional challenges in this field are increasing progressively [41]. Research shows that most secondary school teachers lack adequate knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their educational relevance. As a result, they remain uncertain in applying the necessary skills and strategies to achieve SDG 4. However, effective teacher training and professional development are prerequisites for attaining the SDGs [42]. The quality of education depends on qualified and dedicated teachers. However, due to the current infrastructure, low salaries, and lack of professional prestige, attracting talented individuals to this profession has become difficult. Without improving the social and economic status of teachers, the implementation of quality education is impossible, especially in rural and suburban areas [43]. To improve educational quality, it is essential to provide teacher training programs, adequate teaching materials in classrooms, ensure teacher attendance, and offer specific support to protect their professional dignity. Additionally, adequate budget allocation in the education sector serves as a foundation for qualitative improvement in education [44].

Most South Asian countries are still significantly behind in achieving SDG 4. Due to inadequate salaries and poor working conditions, recruiting and retaining competent teachers has become difficult, posing a major barrier to attaining quality education [45]. Studies have found a direct correlation between teachers' status and salary with the quality of education. Job security, training opportunities, time for class preparation, mental health services, and additional government duties negatively affect teachers' professional competence [46]. Issues such as question leaks, corruption, and overcrowded classrooms significantly contribute to the decline in education quality. Reducing teachers' workload, providing adequate training, and ensuring a quality classroom environment are necessary [47]. Without enhancing teachers' financial and social status, achieving quality education is impossible. The lack of teacher involvement and adequate training in curriculum changes and new teaching methods reduces their motivation [48]. Since the post-2015 global education agenda expects teachers to impart knowledge and skills in life skills, human rights, peace, and ethical education, necessary professional support is often lacking in many areas [19]. Although a student-centred education system has been established, teachers' responsibilities have not diminished; rather, they have increased. Quality education is achievable only if teachers effectively serve as facilitators [43]. Recruiting quality teachers is essential as a core element of quality education. Strengthening the teaching profession through foundational training, continuous in-service training, refresher courses every five years, appropriate salaries, and professional respect can ensure an efficient and sustainable teaching workforce [25]. Globally, improving the quality of education requires teachers to achieve higher qualifications and become proficient in technology-based teaching [40]. This study was conducted to explore, from the perspective and experiences of students, the indispensability of teachers' effectiveness, professional ethics, sense of responsibility, and teaching methods in ensuring quality education, and to examine how classroom teaching practices can contribute to achieving quality education.

Main Research Question:

How is the role of teachers in ensuring quality education at the secondary level reflected in students' perspectives, and how effective is it in the implementation of SDG 4?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the fundamental characteristics of quality education from the students' perspective, and how significant is the teacher's role in this context?
2. How do teachers' professional competencies, ethics, and sense of responsibility impact the achievement of quality education in the classroom?
3. According to students, which teacher behaviours and methods are considered most effective for attaining quality education?

Theoretical Framework:

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, humans learn primarily through observation, imitation, and responses to their environment. In this context, when teachers demonstrate punctuality, quality teaching, classroom discipline, encourage creative work, teach good citizenship, and exhibit ethical behaviour inside and outside the classroom, students gradually internalize these behaviours [49]. Therefore, students perceive teacher behaviour as crucial in their learning process. Based on Lovat et al. (2009) Value Education Theory, teachers are not limited to mere instruction but also play a significant role in fostering morality, humanity, and social awareness among students. This study reveals that students expect to gain practical knowledge, creativity, ethical values, and citizenship education from their teachers [50]. UNESCO's (2005) Quality Education Framework emphasises the importance of competent teachers, appropriate environments, transparent assessment, and active student participation in determining the quality of education. Students in this research identified subject-matter expertise, proper execution of teachers' duties, effective evaluation systems, an active learning environment, and small class sizes as prerequisites for quality education [51].

Conceptual Framework:

This study conceptualizes teachers' roles (competence, responsibility, ethics, professional conduct) as the independent variable; students' attitudes (interest in learning, active participation, teacher evaluation, outcomes) as the mediating variable; and quality education (skills, values, and outcomes aligned with SDG 4) as the dependent variable. From this framework, it is inferred that teachers' professional and ethical roles significantly enhance students' learning attitudes and participation, thereby playing a vital role in ensuring quality education, which is fully supportive of SDG 4 implementation.

Hypotheses:

H_1: Teachers' professional competence, ethics, and punctuality positively influence students' attitudes toward quality education.

H_2: Teachers' responsible and humane behaviour affects the development of creativity, ethics, and good citizenship qualities among students.

H_3: Appropriate student-teacher ratios and teacher-dependent instructional strategies increase the likelihood of achieving quality education in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study followed a mixed-methods approach. For primary data collection, Begumganj Upazila of Noakhali district was purposively selected as the study area. From this population, one educational institution was chosen using purposive sampling. The total student population in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the selected institution was 516. From this population, students of grades 9 and 10 were selected as samples based on roll numbers ranging from 1 to 45. Using a lottery method, 50 students from two sections of grade 9 and 99 students from four sections of grade 10 were selected. For grades 11 and 12, the sampling was based on the scheduled class days (Sunday to Thursday). Using the lottery method, one day (Wednesday) was randomly chosen from these five days. The students present on that selected day constituted the sample, which totaled 54 students. For secondary data, various sources were used, including books, newspapers, web articles, journal articles, and the official website of the selected institution. The data collection instruments included

questionnaires, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Interviews were conducted with 20 students, and 3 FGDs were organized. Participants included 6 students from grade 9, 6 students from grade 10, and 5 students from grade 12. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, while qualitative data were manually coded and categorized. The results were reviewed and validated through the triangulation method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All participants in the study resided in Noakhali district, aged between 14 and 17 years, and were students enrolled in grades 9 to 12 in 2025. Among them, 69% were female. According to the findings, 99% of participants agreed that quality education is defined as the knowledge through which students can become humane, ethical, employable, and responsible citizens capable of competing in a changing global context. The inclusion of sustainable development values, perspectives, creativity, and civic mindset in the curriculum was deemed essential for achieving quality education [21]. The study indicated that through quality education, students become good citizens, and its impact is social rather than merely personal [11]. Furthermore, it was noted that teachers strive to develop students as confident global citizens [20].

Regarding the role of teachers in ensuring quality education, 78.8% of participants believed that the teacher's role is the most critical. Goodwin (2010) also includes teachers as a prerequisite for quality education [26]. Previous research similarly identified teachers as a key factor in ensuring quality education [7, 36, 23]. Participants identified the roles that teachers must play to ensure quality education as follows: demonstrating competence in delivering modified lessons, possessing adequate knowledge and skills on the subject matter, utilizing allocated teaching time fully and properly, taking full responsibility for teaching and lesson conduct, motivating and encouraging students toward learning, fostering creativity, humanity, ethics, and citizenship values among students, ensuring equitable assessment of all students, conducting formative, midterm, and summative assessments appropriately, and teachers maintaining ethical conduct. Among these, 41.6% of participants agreed that all these aspects are important in ensuring quality education. 94.1% of participants believe that there is a deep and positive relationship between the teacher's role and ensuring quality education. According to Liberent (2012), the quality of teacher-student relationships influences students' social development, academic motivation, engagement, and willingness to learn [35]. High-quality teachers are capable of having a profound and positive impact on students' academic success and performance [12]. A sincere and supportive teacher-student relationship, along with high expectations for students, fosters a positive and nurturing learning environment that contributes to students' social development and the formation of positive behaviour. Teachers inspire students with ideals of excellence, integrity, and social justice and prepare them to build a united and peaceful nation [20].

Hence, 100% of participants emphasised that teachers must play a positive role in ensuring quality education. However, 57.7% of participants believed that the education they currently receive is not of quality. Various studies have found that teachers are often unaware of the teaching skills required to achieve the SDG targets [42], and appropriate training and quality improvement systems are lacking [39]. Yet, the quality and teaching methods of teachers remain a primary determinant of students' academic success [35]. Furthermore, research shows that limited resources impair educational quality in many countries [6]. Particularly in South Asia—except Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka—most countries are behind in achieving the SDG goal of inclusive and quality primary and secondary education for all by 2030 [45]. Therefore, although participation in education has increased in Bangladesh, progress toward quality education remains minimal.

Regarding classroom practices that ensure quality education, participants identified: fulfilling responsibilities and maintaining ethics, conducting classes by trained subject teachers, regular evaluation of learning progress, encouraging interest in classes and learning, providing opportunities for practical teaching, and ensuring the full completion of class activities. Among these, 76.7% believed that teachers can ensure quality education in the classroom by fully performing their duties and maintaining ethical standards.

Teachers' professional competence, ongoing training, academic qualifications, personal qualities, teacher-student relationships, classroom management skills, and high expectations for students collectively play an important role in improving educational quality. These attributes create a favourable, motivating, and

constructive learning environment, supporting students' learning capacity and interest. Moreover, professional autonomy and adherence to ethics by teachers align with participants' views [43, 20].

The quality of a teacher, that is, professional competence, subject knowledge, instructional strategies, and communication ability with students, plays a fundamental role in ensuring quality education in the classroom [6]. A skilled teacher must possess deep subject knowledge, a clear understanding of students' mentalities and learning styles, and the confidence to respond to changing classroom conditions [37].

Regarding class size, 69.5% of participants believed that maintaining 35 students per classroom facilitates quality teaching. Previous research shows that many teachers face challenges teaching large classes or many students, which often hinders their ability to deliver content effectively according to their professional competence, thus compromising the quality of teaching [52]. Haque, 2025). The validity of the findings was confirmed through interviews and strengthened by participants' consensus during FGDs. Moreover, 100% of participants emphasised the importance of teachers' ethical conduct.

CONCLUSION

According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, education is a fundamental human right. Additionally, the Government of Bangladesh has placed significant emphasis on achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 for inclusive and quality education for all. However, Bangladesh remains behind in achieving SDG 4 [25]. As the findings reveal, there is a profound and positive relationship between ensuring quality education and the role of teachers. Therefore, alongside securing the role of teachers, it is essential to cultivate students' positive attitudes toward teachers, their interest, and active participation in classroom activities to guarantee quality education.

The results indicate that students are currently not receiving quality education, highlighting the urgent need for policymakers to take effective action to ensure quality education. Teachers are the primary agents in ensuring quality education; hence, to improve educational quality, it is imperative to provide teachers with adequate salaries and benefits, regular professional training, social and governmental recognition, and infrastructural improvements in schools and classrooms [43]. Moreover, maintaining an optimal student-teacher ratio and fostering a positive working environment for teachers are equally crucial.

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