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## Student Mental Health, Social Pressures, and Academic Culture: Insights from Bangladesh's Education Policy Changes

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 on student anxiety, stress, and social dynamics. The policy aims to shift education away from rote learning and high-stakes examinations toward continuous assessment, digital learning, and project-based pedagogy. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected survey data from 300 students and Key Informant Interviews with 20 teachers. The findings show that the policy has increased student anxiety and stress, especially among students in rural areas with limited access to digital tools. Teachers also reported emotional challenges among students and limited preparedness to provide mental health support. Although the policy has the potential to improve educational quality, it may also create psychosocial pressure, social disconnection, and unequal learning experiences if not supported by adequate infrastructure, teacher training, and mental health services.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's education system has experienced major changes through the National Curriculum Framework 2022. This reform aims to move away from rote learning and high-stakes examinations toward competency-based learning, continuous assessment, digital learning, and project-based pedagogy. The policy is intended to develop students' critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving skills, and holistic learning outcomes. This direction is consistent with global education trends that emphasize competency-based education and learner-centered development (Catacutan et al., 2023).

Although the reform has strong educational goals, its impact on student mental health and social relationships needs careful attention. Educational change can create uncertainty, especially when students, teachers, and families are required to adjust to new assessment systems, classroom practices, and digital learning expectations. Previous studies show that educational policies and assessment systems can influence student stress, anxiety, and well-being, particularly when reforms increase performance pressure or create unclear expectations (Mulvenon et al., 2005; Baker et al., 2015; Högberg and Horn, 2022).

One major concern is the shift from traditional examinations to continuous assessment. Although continuous assessment is designed to reduce dependence on high-stakes exams, it may also create a different form of pressure because students feel that their performance is being evaluated constantly. In a society where academic success is highly valued, repeated assessment may increase fear of failure, competition, and emotional burden among students (Kohn, 2000; Alam et al., 2023a). This issue is important because academic pressure can affect not only learning performance but also students' psychological well-being.

Another important issue is digital learning integration. The new curriculum encourages the use of technology in education, but access to digital tools remains unequal in Bangladesh. Students in urban areas may have better access to devices, internet, and digital learning platforms, while rural students often face limited access and weaker infrastructure (Rahman et al., 2021; Badiuzzaman et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2024). This digital divide may increase stress and frustration among students who are expected to participate in technology-supported learning without adequate resources.

The reform may also influence students' social dynamics. Education is not only an academic process but also a space for social interaction, peer support, emotional development, and identity formation. When learning becomes more individualized, assessment-driven, or technology-dependent, students may have fewer opportunities for collaboration and face-to-face interaction. Previous research shows that peer relationships and collaborative learning are important for students' emotional support, social development, and academic engagement (Wentzel and Watkins, 2002; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Barry et al., 2017).

Teachers also play a crucial role in the success of education reform. However, policy changes may increase teacher workload and require new skills in assessment, digital pedagogy, and student support. Without sufficient training, teachers may feel unprepared to implement the new curriculum and respond to students' emotional needs. Studies on educational reform emphasize the importance of teacher preparation, professional development, and institutional support in successful policy implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Akter and Islam, 2019; Haque et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2025).

This study examines the impact of Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 on student anxiety, stress, and social dynamics. Using survey data from students and Key Informant Interviews with teachers, the study explores how continuous assessment, digital learning, and project-based pedagogy affect student well-being and social relationships. The study aims to provide insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders so that education reform can improve academic quality while also protecting student mental health, social connection, and inclusive learning participation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Education Policy Reform and Student Well-Being**

Education policy reform often aims to improve curriculum quality, learning outcomes, and students' future readiness. Many countries have shifted toward competency-based education, learner-centered pedagogy, project-based learning, and digital integration. These reforms are intended to help students develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Anderson, 2018; Catacutan *et al.*, 2023). However, educational change can also create emotional pressure when students, teachers, and families are required to adapt quickly to new learning expectations.

Global experiences show that education reforms may affect students' mental health in different ways. In some systems, high-stakes testing has been associated with academic stress, anxiety, and reduced well-being (Kohn, 2000; Baker *et al.*, 2015; Högberg and Horn, 2022). In other systems, continuous assessment is introduced to reduce dependence on final examinations, but it may still create stress when students feel constantly evaluated. Studies on school burnout and academic pressure show that repeated assessment and unclear expectations can contribute to anxiety, exhaustion, and fear of failure (Salmela-Aro, 2017; Colbert-Getz *et al.*, 2013).

Broader studies on educational reform also show that policy implementation may influence student well-being through accountability systems, school climate, digital readiness, social capital, and competitive academic culture. Standards-based accountability and exam-oriented systems have been associated with pressure, anxiety, and performance-related stress among students (Hamilton *et al.*, 2012; George, 2024; von der Embse *et al.*, 2015). Studies on digital education and teacher digital readiness also show that technology integration requires adequate preparation, access, and pedagogical support to avoid widening inequalities (Leoste *et al.*, 2022; Mudra, 2020). In addition, student well-being is shaped by school relationships, social capital, sustainability-oriented learning environments, and broader cultural expectations around academic success (Bowers and Cummings, 2017; Boeve-de Pauw *et al.*, 2015; Alam *et al.*, 2023b; Saito, 2017; Su and Lee, 2023; Sung and Park, 2018).

### **2.2. Digital Learning, Inequality, and Social Dynamics**

Digital learning has become an important part of modern education reform. Technology can support flexible learning, digital literacy, and access to educational resources. However, technology-based learning may also increase inequality when students do not have equal access to devices, the internet, or digital learning support. This issue is particularly important in Bangladesh, where rural students may experience greater barriers to digital participation than urban students (Rahman *et al.*, 2021; Badiuzzaman *et al.*, 2021; Karim *et al.*, 2024).

The use of digital learning can also affect students' social relationships. Education is not only a process of acquiring knowledge but also a space for peer interaction, collaboration, and emotional support. When learning becomes more individualized or technology-dependent, students may experience reduced face-to-face interaction, social isolation, or weaker peer relationships (Wentzel and Watkins, 2002; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Barry et al., 2017). Studies on online learning and digital environments also show that excessive screen use and reduced in-person interaction may contribute to loneliness, anxiety, and digital fatigue (Cockerham et al., 2021; Jo, 2023; Lee and Choi, 2020; Burns et al., 2020).

### 2.3. Teacher Readiness and Mental Health Support

Teachers are central to the success of curriculum reform because they translate policy into classroom practice. Effective reform requires teacher preparation, professional development, clear guidelines, and institutional support (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haque et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2025). Without adequate training, teachers may struggle to implement continuous assessment, project-based learning, and technology-supported instruction. This can increase teacher workload and reduce their ability to support students' emotional needs.

Teacher readiness is also important because students may experience stress, anxiety, and social difficulties during periods of educational change. Teachers are often the first to observe changes in student behavior, motivation, peer interaction, and emotional well-being. However, if teachers lack mental health awareness or support systems, they may find it difficult to respond effectively (Akter and Islam, 2019). This highlights the need to integrate student well-being, social-emotional learning, and teacher support into education reform. Social and Emotional Learning programs can help students develop emotional regulation, empathy, and coping skills, which may reduce anxiety and improve academic and social outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Prince and Uzoamaka, 2024).

## 3. METHODS

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine the impact of Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 on student anxiety, stress, and social dynamics. The design combined quantitative survey data from students with qualitative Key Informant Interviews with teachers. This approach was used to capture both the measurable patterns of student experience and the deeper classroom-based perspectives of teachers.

The quantitative component involved a survey of 300 students from different educational levels and geographic locations, including both urban and rural areas. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure variation in gender, age, academic level, and location. The survey examined students' experiences of stress, anxiety, mental health, social relationships, digital learning, and adaptation to the new assessment system.

The qualitative component involved 20 teachers selected purposively because of their direct experience with the implementation of the new education policy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of student anxiety, stress, social relationships, digital access, classroom adjustment, and teacher preparedness. Interviews were conducted in person or through video calls and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and t-tests, were used to examine differences across student groups. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded to identify

recurring themes related to student stress, anxiety, digital divide, social isolation, teacher readiness, and policy implementation. Findings from both data sources were compared to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy's impact.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on how Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 affected student anxiety, stress, mental health, and social relationships. The analysis combines student survey data and teacher interview findings to provide a broader understanding of the policy's psychosocial impact.

##### 4.1. Student Anxiety and Stress under the New Education Policy

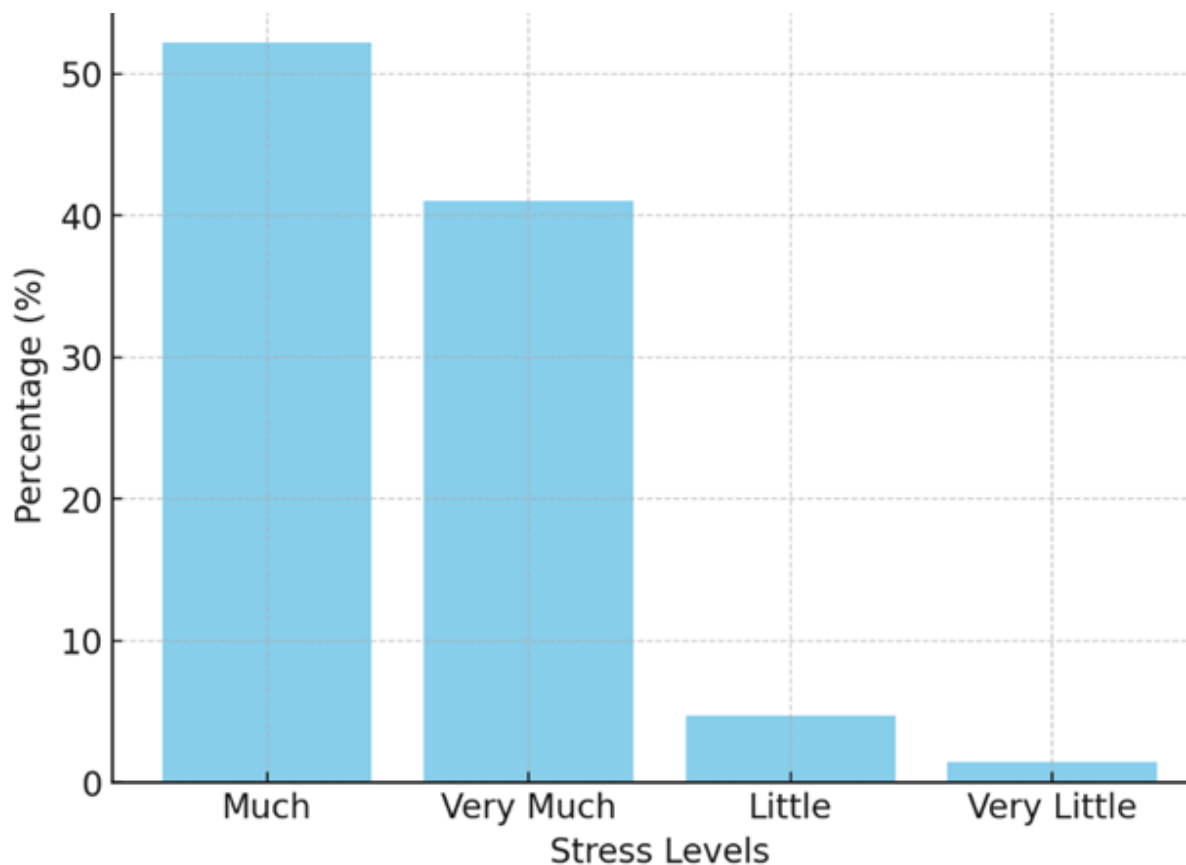
The survey results show that the new education policy has increased student stress and anxiety. As shown in Table 1, 52.2% of students reported that their stress increased "much," while 41.0% reported that it increased "very much." Only a small proportion of students reported little or very little increase in stress. These findings suggest that the shift toward continuous assessment, project-based learning, and new classroom expectations has created substantial academic pressure for many students.

**Table 1.** Impact of the new education policy on student anxiety and stress.

VARIABLES	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Stress increased due to the new education policy	Little	13	4.7
	Much	145	52.2
	Neutral	2	0.7
	Very little	4	1.4
	Very much	114	41.0
Increased feelings of anxiety	Little	13	4.7
	Much	154	55.4
	Neutral	6	2.2
	Very little	4	1.4
	Very much	100	36.0
The kind of stress created by the new education policy	Comparison with others	3	1.1
	Difficulty adapting to new procedures	179	64.4
	Exam pressure	82	29.5
	No pressure	12	4.3
	Others	2	0.7
Mental health affected by the new education policy	Good	4	1.4
	Negative	171	61.5
	No effect	1	0.4
	Very negative	102	36.7
The new education policy affected social relationships	Negative	178	64.0
	No effect	6	2.2
	Very negative	94	33.8
Quality of relationship with friends	Good change	1	0.4
	Negative change	177	63.7
	No change	3	1.1
	Very negative change	97	34.9

The data also show that anxiety increased for most students. A total of 55.4% of students reported that their anxiety increased “much,” and 36.0% reported that it increased “very much.” This indicates that the policy change affects not only academic workload but also students’ emotional well-being. Teachers confirmed this pattern in the Key Informant Interviews. They explained that many students felt uncertain about the new curriculum, the continuous assessment system, and the changing classroom expectations.

**Figure 1** shows student stress levels after the new education policy. Most students experienced high levels of stress after the policy was introduced. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that changes in assessment systems and academic expectations can increase student anxiety and stress when students are not adequately prepared for the transition (Kohn, 2000; Baker et al., 2015; Högberg and Horn, 2022).



**Figure 1.** Student stress levels after the new education policy.

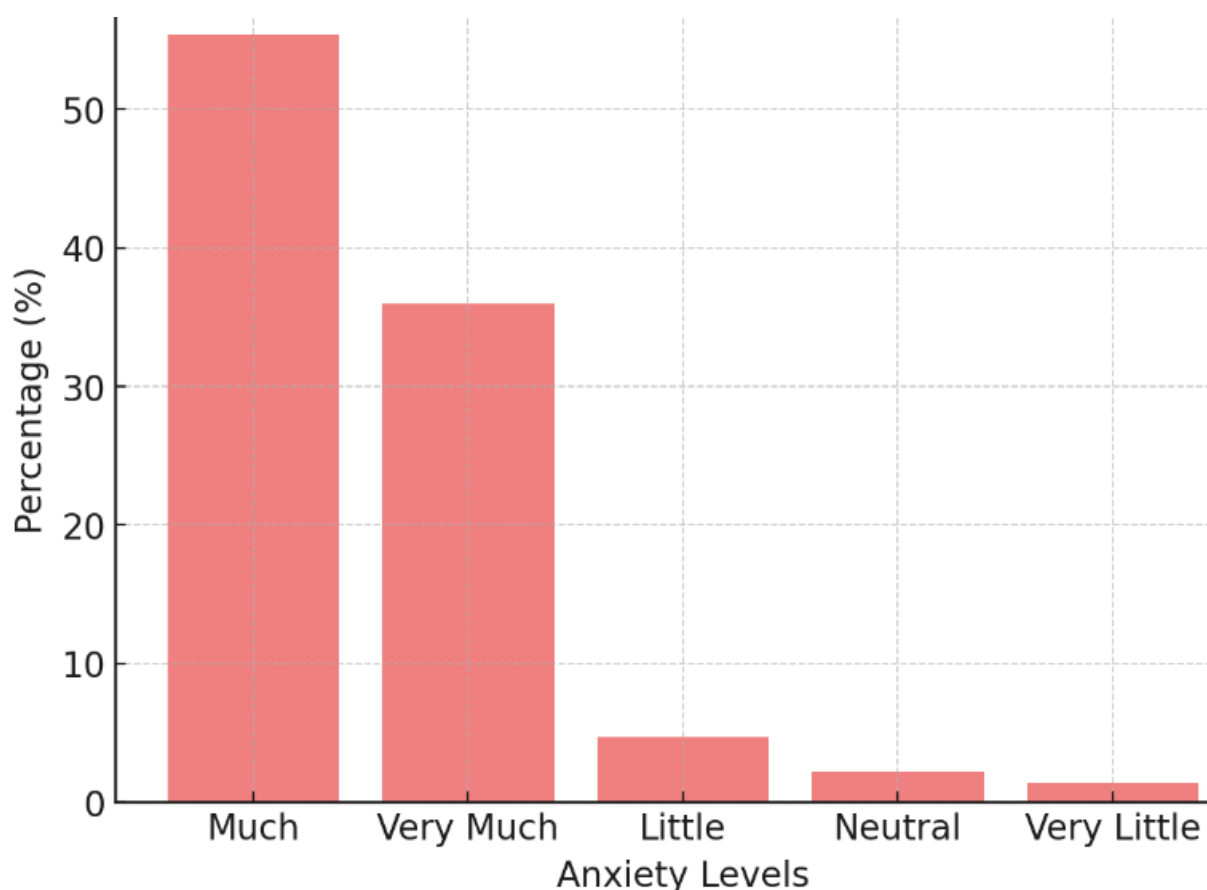
#### 4.2. Continuous Assessment, Digital Learning, and Mental Health

One of the strongest sources of stress was difficulty adapting to the new procedures. **Table 1** shows that 64.4% of students identified difficulty adapting to new procedures as the main kind of stress created by the policy. This suggests that the transition from traditional examination-based learning to continuous assessment was not easy for students. Although continuous assessment is intended to reduce dependence on high-stakes examinations, it can also create continuous pressure because students feel that they are always being evaluated.

Teachers also reported that students were struggling with the increased academic workload and unclear expectations. Some students experienced fear of failure because they

were unsure how their performance would be assessed under the new system. This finding supports earlier research showing that frequent assessment can create chronic stress when students feel constantly judged or unable to meet expectations (Salmela-Aro, 2017; Colbert-Getz et al., 2013).

**Figure 2** shows student anxiety levels after the new education policy. Student anxiety was concentrated in the “much” and “very much” categories. This indicates that the reform created emotional pressure for many students. The pressure was not only related to assessment but also to digital learning. The policy encourages technology integration, but many students, especially in rural areas, do not have equal access to devices, the internet, or digital learning support. This digital divide may increase frustration, academic exclusion, and feelings of inadequacy among students. The results show that 61.5% of students reported that their mental health was negatively affected, while 36.7% reported a very negative effect. This is a serious finding because it indicates that the reform has psychosocial consequences that go beyond academic adjustment. Teachers also reported that the increased use of digital devices and lack of face-to-face interaction contributed to mental stress and social isolation. These findings are consistent with studies showing that digital learning may affect student well-being when it reduces direct interaction or creates unequal learning access (Cockerham et al., 2021; Jo, 2023; Lee and Choi, 2020; Burns et al., 2020).



**Figure 2.** Student anxiety levels after the new education policy.

### 4.3. Changes in Social Dynamics and Peer Relationships

The new education policy also affected students' social relationships. Table 1 shows that 64.0% of students reported a negative effect on their social relationships, and 33.8% reported a very negative effect. In addition, 63.7% of students reported a negative change in the quality of their friendships, while 34.9% reported a very negative change. These findings suggest that the reform influenced not only how students learn but also how they relate to peers.

Teachers explained that continuous assessment and project-based learning increased competition among students. Instead of strengthening collaboration, the policy sometimes created pressure to perform individually. Some teachers observed that students had less time for extracurricular activities, peer interaction, and informal social support. This is concerning because peer relationships are important for emotional development, social learning, and student well-being (Wentzel and Watkins, 2002; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Barry et al., 2017).

**Figure 3** presents the perceived impact of the new education policy on social dynamics and relationships. The policy affected several connected areas, including student stress, social isolation, peer interaction, family expectations, digital access, and teacher support. This shows that the mental health impact of education reform is not caused by one factor alone. Instead, it is shaped by the interaction of assessment pressure, technology access, classroom expectations, family pressure, and peer competition. The findings also show that the digital divide affected social dynamics. Students with limited access to technology may feel left behind, especially when digital tools are expected in learning activities. This can create separation between students who have digital access and those who do not. In rural areas, unequal access to technology may therefore increase both academic disadvantage and social disconnection.

### 4.4. Family, Classmate Attitudes, and Educational Uncertainty

**Table 2** shows that students also perceived negative attitudes toward the new education policy among family members and classmates. A total of 49.3% of students reported that their family members viewed the policy as bad, while 48.2% reported that family members viewed it as very bad. Similarly, 53.6% of students reported that classmates had a bad attitude toward the policy, and 44.2% reported that classmates had a very bad attitude. Most students did not feel clearer about educational goals after the policy change. A total of 62.9% reported that educational goals became unclear, and 32.4% reported that they became very unclear. This indicates that communication about the reform may not have been sufficient. When students do not understand the purpose, assessment process, or long-term benefits of a policy, they may experience uncertainty and anxiety.

Teachers also reported that parents often pushed students to perform well under the new system, even when families themselves did not fully understand the policy. This created additional pressure at home. In this sense, the new education policy affected the relationship between school expectations, family expectations, and student emotional well-being. The findings suggest that policy implementation should include clear communication with parents and students, not only training for teachers.

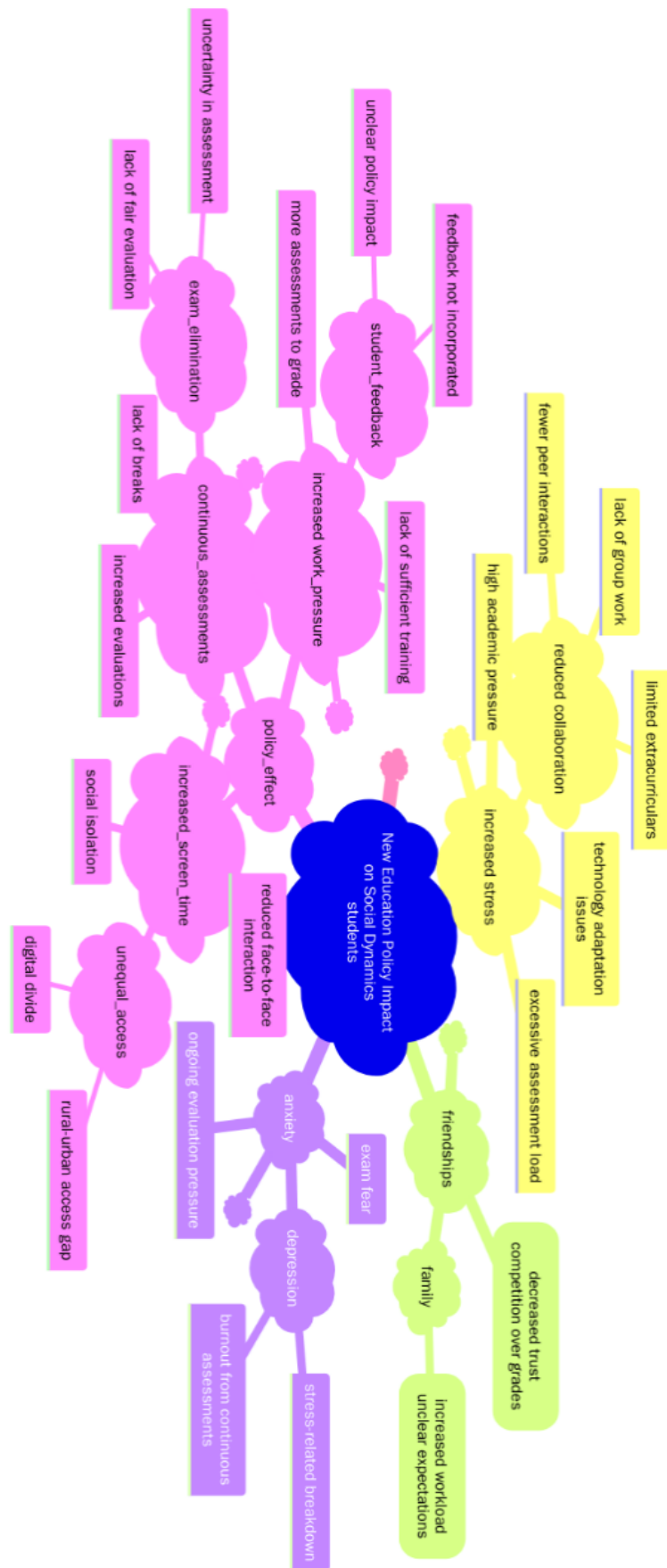


Figure 3. The new education policy's impact on social dynamics and relationships.

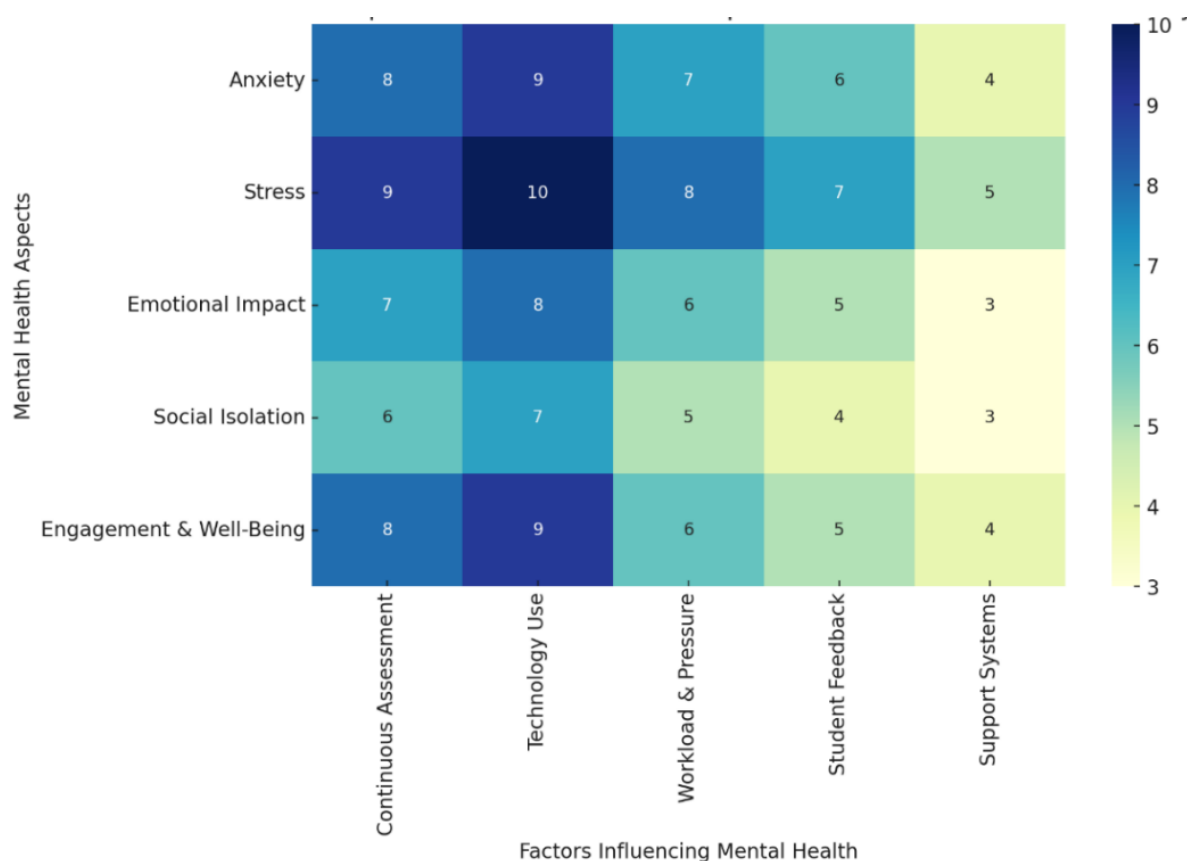
**Table 2.** New education policy impact on social dynamics.

VARIABLES	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Views of family members about the new education policy	Bad	137	49.3
	Moderate	7	2.5
	Very bad	134	48.2
Attitude toward this policy among classmates	Bad	149	53.6
	Moderate	6	2.2
	Very bad	123	44.2
Views of family members about the new education policy	Little	13	4.7
	Much	145	52.2
	Neutral	2	0.7
	Very little	4	1.4
	Very much	114	41.0
Feel clearer about educational goals as a result of this educational policy	Clear	2	0.7
	Unchanged	11	4.0
	Unclear	175	62.9
	Very unclear	90	32.4

#### 4.5. Teachers' Perceptions of Mental Health Impacts

Teachers' interviews supported the survey findings. They observed that students experienced anxiety, stress, emotional pressure, social isolation, and reduced engagement. Teachers also reported that they were not fully prepared to provide mental health support. This is important because teachers are often the first adults to notice changes in student behavior, motivation, and emotional well-being.

**Figure 4** presents teachers' perceptions of the mental health impacts of the new education policy. Teachers perceived continuous assessment, technology use, workload pressure, student feedback, and support systems as major factors influencing student mental health. Continuous assessment and technology use were especially associated with anxiety and stress. This supports the idea that reform implementation must consider teacher readiness and student support systems. The findings show that teachers need professional development not only in curriculum implementation but also in mental health awareness, responsive pedagogy, and social-emotional support. Without adequate training, teachers may struggle to identify and respond to student distress. This supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of teacher preparation and institutional support in education reform (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Akter and Islam, 2019; Haque et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2025).



**Figure 4.** Teachers' perceptions of mental health impacts.

#### 4.6. Implications for Inclusive and Psychosocially Supportive Education

Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 has both promise and risk. On one hand, the policy supports competency-based learning, project-based pedagogy, and digital integration. On the other hand, the findings show that students experience increased stress, anxiety, social disconnection, and confusion about educational goals. These problems are especially important in inclusive education because students with limited resources, rural backgrounds, emotional vulnerability, or weak support systems may be more affected by reform-related pressure. Policy implementation should be supported by a psychosocial framework that addresses student well-being, teacher readiness, family communication, and equitable access to learning resources (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Prince and Uzoamaka, 2024). The findings also highlight the importance of regular policy evaluation. Education reform should not be judged only by curriculum design or academic outcomes. It should also be evaluated based on student well-being, social relationships, digital inclusion, teacher readiness, and family understanding. A reform that improves academic quality but increases psychological distress may not achieve holistic educational development. Educational reform must be implemented with attention to students' lived experiences. Continuous assessment, digital learning, and project-based pedagogy can improve education only when they are supported by clear guidance, adequate resources, teacher preparedness, and mental health services. For Bangladesh, the success of the new education policy depends not only on academic innovation but also on its ability to protect student well-being and promote inclusive learning participation.

#### 4.7. Policy Reform, Psychosocial Risk, and Support Strategies

The National Curriculum Framework 2022 should be understood not only as an academic reform but also as a psychosocial transition for students. The reform introduces continuous assessment, digital learning, and project-based pedagogy, all of which require students to adapt to new expectations. However, the data show that many students experienced increased stress, anxiety, social disconnection, and uncertainty about educational goals. This indicates that curriculum reform can produce unintended emotional consequences when implementation is not supported by adequate communication, teacher preparation, mental health support, and equitable access to learning resources.

A key issue is the relationship between continuous assessment and psychological pressure. Continuous assessment is often introduced to reduce dependence on final examinations and to support more holistic learning. However, the findings show that many students interpreted continuous assessment as constant evaluation. As shown in Table 1, 52.2% of students reported that stress increased “much,” and 41.0% reported that stress increased “very much.” This suggests that the policy may have shifted pressure from final examinations to repeated performance monitoring. Previous studies also show that assessment systems can increase anxiety when students experience fear of failure, unclear expectations, or repeated judgment (Kohn, 2000; Baker et al., 2015; Högberg and Horn, 2022; von der Embse et al., 2015).

As shown in **Table 3**, the main psychosocial risks were not caused by one policy component alone. Instead, they emerged from the combined effects of assessment pressure, digital inequality, workload changes, limited social interaction, and insufficient support systems. This is important because education reform is often evaluated through academic indicators, while students’ emotional and social experiences may receive less attention. The findings suggest that student well-being should be treated as a core indicator of policy success, not as a secondary concern.

The digital divide is another major concern. Although digital learning can improve access to information and support modern pedagogy, it may also widen inequality when students do not have equal access to devices, internet connectivity, or digital literacy support. This is particularly relevant in Bangladesh, where rural students often face greater barriers to technology-based learning. The findings show that students’ difficulty adapting to new procedures was one of the strongest sources of stress. This supports previous studies showing that digital learning can increase inequality, isolation, and stress when technological access and readiness are uneven (Badiuzzaman et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2021; Cockerham et al., 2021; Lee and Choi, 2020).

The social effects of the reform are also important. Students reported negative changes in friendships, social relationships, and classmate attitudes. This finding shows that academic reform can reshape peer culture. When students feel pressured by continuous assessment and performance expectations, collaboration may weaken, and competition may increase. Peer relationships are important for emotional support, belonging, motivation, and social development (Wentzel and Watkins, 2002; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Barry et al., 2017). Therefore, reforms that reduce opportunities for social connection may unintentionally weaken students’ emotional resilience.

**Table 3.** Psychosocial risks identified from the implementation of the new education policy.

<b>POLICY COMPONENT</b>	<b>MAIN PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK</b>	<b>EVIDENCE FROM FINDINGS</b>	<b>SUPPORTING LITERATURE</b>
Continuous assessment	Constant pressure, fear of failure, and anxiety	Most students reported increased stress and anxiety after policy implementation	<a href="#">Kohn (2000)</a> ; <a href="#">Baker et al. (2015)</a> ; <a href="#">Högberg and Horn (2022)</a> ; <a href="#">von der Embse et al. (2015)</a>
Digital learning integration	Digital fatigue, unequal access, and frustration	Students with limited digital access, especially in rural areas, faced greater difficulty adapting	<a href="#">Rahman et al. (2021)</a> ; <a href="#">Badiuzzaman et al. (2021)</a> ; <a href="#">Karim et al. (2024)</a> ; <a href="#">Mudra (2020)</a>
Project-based learning	Increased workload and uncertainty	Teachers reported that students struggled with the workload and unclear expectations	<a href="#">Anderson (2018)</a> ; <a href="#">Catacutan et al. (2023)</a> ; <a href="#">Islam et al. (2025)</a>
Reduced peer interaction	Social isolation and weaker friendships	Many students reported negative changes in social relationships and friendships	<a href="#">Wentzel and Watkins (2002)</a> ; <a href="#">Baumeister and Leary (1995)</a> ; <a href="#">Barry et al. (2017)</a>
Limited teacher preparedness	Weak mental health response and inconsistent support	Teachers reported limited readiness to address students' emotional needs	<a href="#">Darling-Hammond (2000)</a> ; <a href="#">Akter and Islam (2019)</a> ; <a href="#">Haque et al. (2024)</a>
Weak communication with families	Confusion, pressure at home, and negative attitudes toward reform	Students reported negative family and classmate attitudes toward the policy	<a href="#">Bowers and Cummings (2017)</a> ; <a href="#">Alam et al. (2023b)</a>

Teacher preparedness is central to reducing these risks. Teachers are expected to implement the new curriculum, manage continuous assessment, guide project-based learning, use digital tools, and respond to student emotional needs. However, the findings show that teachers felt underprepared to provide mental health support. This is a serious concern because teachers are often the first to observe changes in student behavior, motivation, anxiety, and peer interaction. Previous research emphasizes that teacher preparation and institutional support are essential for successful reform implementation ([Darling-Hammond, 2000](#); [Akter and Islam, 2019](#); [Haque et al., 2024](#); [Islam et al., 2025](#)). Without teacher training in mental health awareness and responsive pedagogy, policy reform may increase both teacher workload and student vulnerability.

To respond to these challenges, schools need a more integrated support framework. The reform should be accompanied by mental health screening, teacher training, parental orientation, peer support, digital access programs, and Social and Emotional Learning. SEL is especially relevant because it helps students develop emotional regulation, empathy, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Previous studies show that SEL programs can improve mental health, reduce anxiety, and strengthen students' academic and social outcomes ([Durlak et al., 2011](#); [Berry et al., 2016](#); [Prince and Uzoamaka, 2024](#)). Emotional intelligence is also relevant because students need emotional awareness and coping strategies to manage academic demands and social pressure ([Jones et al., 2013](#)).

As shown in **Table 4**, the implementation of education reform requires coordinated support from schools, teachers, parents, communities, and policymakers. Mental health support should not be treated as an optional addition after academic reform has been introduced. Instead, it should be embedded into the reform process from the beginning. This is especially important for students in rural and marginalized communities who may face combined pressures from academic change, digital exclusion, family expectations, and limited access to support services.

**Table 4.** Recommended support strategies for reducing psychosocial risks during education reform.

AREA OF SUPPORT	RECOMMENDED STRATEGY	EXPECTED BENEFIT	RELATED EVIDENCE
Student mental health	Provide school-based counseling, stress monitoring, and referral systems	Early identification of anxiety, stress, and emotional distress	<a href="#">Durlak et al. (2011)</a> ; <a href="#">Berry et al. (2016)</a> ; <a href="#">Prince and Uzoamaka (2024)</a>
Teacher readiness	Train teachers in continuous assessment, digital pedagogy, and mental health awareness	Stronger classroom implementation and better student support	<a href="#">Darling-Hammond (2000)</a> ; <a href="#">Akter and Islam (2019)</a> ; <a href="#">Islam et al. (2025)</a>
Digital inclusion	Provide devices, internet access, and digital literacy support for rural students	Reduced digital inequality and lower frustration	<a href="#">Rahman et al. (2021)</a> ; <a href="#">Badiuzzaman et al. (2021)</a> ; <a href="#">Karim et al. (2024)</a>
Assessment clarity	Explain assessment criteria, feedback systems, and learning goals clearly	Reduced uncertainty and fear of failure	<a href="#">Kohn (2000)</a> ; <a href="#">Colbert-Getz et al. (2013)</a> ; <a href="#">Salmela-Aro (2017)</a>
Peer and social support	Strengthen collaborative learning, group projects, and peer mentoring	Improved belonging, friendship quality, and social resilience	<a href="#">Wentzel and Watkins (2002)</a> ; <a href="#">Baumeister and Leary (1995)</a> ; <a href="#">Barry et al. (2017)</a>
Family engagement	Orient parents on policy goals, assessment changes, and supportive parenting	Reduced pressure at home and better family understanding	<a href="#">Bowers and Cummings (2017)</a> ; <a href="#">Alam et al. (2023b)</a>
Inclusive implementation	Prioritize students from rural, low-income, and emotionally vulnerable backgrounds	More equitable participation in reform	<a href="#">Su and Lee (2023)</a> ; <a href="#">Sung and Park (2018)</a>

The findings also suggest that inclusive education should be understood broadly. Inclusion is not limited to students with formally identified disabilities or special needs. It also includes students who are vulnerable because of poverty, rural location, digital exclusion, emotional stress, or limited social support. In this sense, the National Curriculum Framework 2022 needs an implementation strategy that recognizes different student realities. A policy that assumes equal readiness among all students may unintentionally deepen inequality. Therefore, inclusive learning participation requires differentiated support, flexible assessment, teacher guidance, and access to psychosocial services.

The success of Bangladesh's education reform depends on balancing academic innovation with student well-being. Continuous assessment, project-based learning, and digital integration can improve education when students are properly supported. However, without clear communication, equitable resources, trained teachers, and mental health services,

these reforms may increase stress and social disconnection. A psychosocially responsive approach is therefore needed to ensure that curriculum reform improves learning quality while also protecting students' emotional well-being and social development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Bangladesh's National Curriculum Framework 2022 has created both opportunities and psychosocial challenges for students. Although the policy aims to improve learning through continuous assessment, digital integration, and project-based pedagogy, the findings indicate increased student stress, anxiety, social disconnection, and uncertainty about educational goals. These effects were stronger among students facing limited digital access and weaker support systems. Teachers also reported limited preparedness to address students' mental health needs during policy implementation. The findings suggest that education reform should not be evaluated only through academic outcomes. Student well-being, social relationships, digital inclusion, teacher readiness, and family understanding must also be considered. To reduce negative effects, schools and policymakers should strengthen mental health support, teacher training, parental communication, equitable digital access, and Social and Emotional Learning programs. A balanced approach is needed so that educational reform can improve academic quality while also protecting students' emotional well-being and inclusive learning participation.

## 6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

## 7. REFERENCES

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