

Prophetic Hard Skills and the Competence of Bangladeshi Madrasa Graduates: Evaluation and Recommendations

Dr. Mohammad Omar Faruq*

Md. Amirul Islam*

Dr. K. A. M. Rifat Hasan*

Abstract

This paper examines the integration of hard skills into the curriculum of Bangladeshi madrasahs, emphasizing the practical skills demonstrated by Prophets as outlined in Islamic texts. While traditional madrasah education in Bangladesh focuses predominantly on spiritual and religious studies, it neglects essential hard skills necessary for modern job markets. Similarly, madrasa graduates believe that worldly work diminishes religious dignity, while the lack of modern education deprives them of skills; mosque service is still a duty. But, prophetic examples highlight the importance of hard skills such as agriculture, maritime engineering, textile technology, and military strategy, which were crucial for self-sufficiency and effective leadership. The study identifies several challenges faced by madrasah graduates, including ideological divisions within Islamic factions, conventional teaching methods, and resistance to integrating scientific knowledge. It also addresses misconceptions and prejudices against worldly skills, often perceived as contrary to Islamic teachings. Despite efforts to modernize, current madrasah graduates struggle with limited practical skills, which affects their employability and economic self-sufficiency. Through a comprehensive review of literature and primary data from discussions with madrasah graduates, the paper proposes recommendations for curriculum integration, teacher training, career counseling, and community engagement. These measures aim to align madrasah education with contemporary job market requirements and the prophetic model of combining both spiritual and practical knowledge. The paper concludes that addressing these issues is vital for preparing madrasah graduates to thrive in the modern world while upholding Islamic values.

Keywords : Hard skills, Curriculum, Madrasa, Employability, Economic, Spiritual, Knowledge

* Associate Professor, Department of Accounting & Information Systems, Jagannath University, Dhaka.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Government City College, Jashore

* Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, Jagannath University, Dhaka.

1. Introduction

The Arabic word madrasah means school, a place for educating its students Islamic books for examples the holy Quran, six hadiths books; Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, Nasa'I, Majah with Muwatta Imam Malik and Sunan al-Darimi and so on theoretically and conventionally. This madrasah, Qwami madrasah run by the priests and local people and Aliya madrasah governed by the government, is basically so widespread in Bangladesh and its students obtaining the Dawrah al-Hadith; the highest degree from the Qwami Madrasah Board and the Kamil degree from the Aliya madrasah Board are called the madrasah graduates. The primary purpose of achieving the degrees by the graduates is to have spirituality in the name of current version of Islam abstaining from hard skills; the technical skills to perform real life performance to have sustenance and provisions. According to the Quran (28:26), "Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy." In this verse, Allah has mentioned hard skill through the strength of Prophet Musa (pbuh). So Prophets' hard skill is defined their technical knowhow to perform their day to day deeds and actions. According to the Quran (21:80), "And I taught him the fashioning of coats of armor to protect you from your [enemy in] battle. So will you then be grateful?" Prophet David (pbuh) had got a hard skill; making armor sold in the market to earn his livelihood. In short, a hard skill is a definite – teachable – learnable – perceptible knack and aptitude or a set of matter-of-fact familiarity with real life vocation that can be clearly defined and measured and is acquired through education, training, or experience. Examples of hard skills include proficiency in a foreign language, computer programming, data analysis, operating machinery and so on (Smith, 2020).

1.1. Significance of the study

All prophets belonged to both hard and soft skills mentioned in the Surah Al-Qasas (28:26) while madrasahs are putting emphasis on soft skills like spirituality and piety in the name of Islam, which do not deal with the modern-day situation and producing graduates with these sorts of soft skills, for which they claim themselves as heirs of the Prophets and choose their professions as so called imam, muazzin, khadems, madrasah teachers, etc. Unlikely, Sultan Suleyman (1520 – 1566), the great ruler of the Ottoman Empire advertised for the position of Imam at the Grand Mosque in Istanbul at the time and mentioned both hard and soft skills required being for the position of Imam, who was required to be fluent in Arabic, Latin, Turkish, and Persian; have deep knowledge of comparative religion, especially the Qur'an, Bible, and Torah; possess expertise in Islamic theology and science, particularly physics and mathematics; demonstrate skills in courtliness, archery, and combat; and have a pleasing appearance with a strong, melodious voice (Redditor, 2021). Regarding this consideration, this study plays a pivotal role in transforming the obsolete concept- putting emphasis on spirituality and piety in the name of Islam- of the madrasah graduates into modern-day concept, Prophetic concept, linked with hard skills required for survival in the state –of – the art world.

1.2. Purposes of the study

This paper aims to explore Prophets' hard skills in a specified way with categorization, figure out the hurdles and contemporary religious prejudices associated with acquiring them, examine the current job market scenario for the madrasah graduates in the absence of such skills and motivate them to become self-sufficient with these skills. It also offers a series of practical and applicable recommendations to address these challenges and biases.

2. Literature Review

Ali et al. (2021) examined the challenges and opportunities for Madrasah graduates in Bangladesh, recommending that Madrasah authorities enhance creativity by integrating subjects like mathematics, science, and technology. They also advocated for teacher training to improve education quality and emphasized the government's role in establishing training institutions for Madrasah teachers, focusing on modern teaching methods and curriculum development. Similarly, the BEI (2011) study on "Modernization of Madrassa Education in Bangladesh" recommended maintaining the distinctiveness of Madrasah education within a unified system by focusing on curriculum and pedagogy development, capacity building, and competitive reforms. It also highlighted the importance of promoting inclusive development and addressing militancy as a separate security concern.

In another study, Islam (2012) argued that education in Bangladesh should focus on intellectual, human resource, moral, and ethical development while balancing national policy with religious importance. He stressed the need to reform the curriculum, improve teaching quality, and enhance pedagogy, particularly in Qaumi madrasahs. Islam also addressed challenges like conflicting perspectives and stigmatization, advocating for strategies to align viewpoints, reduce stigma, and integrate market forces into education.

While these studies underscore various initiatives to improve the skills of Madrasah graduates, they overlook a critical aspect—specifically, the lack of research on the hard skills attributed to prophets that could help Madrasah graduates secure jobs in mainstream markets. This study aims to fill this gap by collecting and analyzing secondary data.

3. Methodology

- 3.1. Inductive and Thematic Approach: The study employs an inductive and thematic approach, utilizing qualitative research methodologies to develop themes from the data.
- 3.2. Extensive Observation: It involves extensive observation to gather information over several years.
- 3.3. Data Collection

For primary data collection, the study has conducted discussions with 100 (One hundred) madrasah graduates from both Qwami and Aliya madrasahs, including those currently employed and those who are not.

Discussion topic: The Prophets and Messengers were skilled in various contemporary matters of their time and they used all these skills to call people towards Allah through worldly work. But you do not want to involve yourself in various worldly professions after acquiring skills in worldly work. Give some reasons for this.

Discussion style: The above-mentioned topic was discussed with each of the 12 madrasah graduates individually. The discussions lasted for a long time, and each of them was met again to find out the main points from the discussion.

For secondary data collection, the study has used diverse publications and journals related to Bangladesh's madrasah education system, analyzing materials from the Curriculum and Textbook Wing of madrasahs, the holy Quran and Hadiths books and Bangladeshi newspapers from 2010 to 2023, including various formats such as essays, news articles, reports, editorials, and sub-editorials.

4. Findings of the study

This section explores the findings obtained from secondary sources and provides interpretations based on thematic analyses, which are subsequently discussed below sequentially.

4.1. Theme One: Prophets' hard skills in their occupations with categorization at a glance

Categorization of Prophets' hard skills	Prophets' Name
Agricultural Science and Farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adam (pbuh): Agronomy ○ Ayyub (pbuh): Agricultural science ○ Shu'ayb (pbuh): Agribusiness consultancy
Textile Industry and Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seth (pbuh): Textile industry innovations (fabric technology and sericulture) ○ Idris (pbuh): Needle invention (garment manufacturing) ○ Ilyas (pbuh): Textile engineering advancements
Marine Engineering and Shipbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Noah (pbuh): Shipbuilding and marine engineering
Trade, Commerce, and Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hud (pbuh): Commerce and trade strategy ○ Saleh (pbuh): Livestock management and dairy entrepreneurship ○ Muhammad (pbuh): Commerce and trade strategy
Architecture and Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ibrahim (pbuh): Architectural consultancy (Kaaba construction)
History and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lot (pbuh): Historical narratives and tourism promotion
Wildlife and Linguistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ishma'il (pbuh): Wildlife and linguistics
Timekeeping and Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yusuf (pbuh): Timekeeping and agricultural distribution inventions
Herding and Pastoralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Moses (pbuh): Herding technology and pastoralism innovations

Category of Prophets' hard skills	Prophets' Name
	○ Isa (pbuh): Wildlife conservation
Military and Metallurgy	○ Dawood (pbuh): Military strategy and metallurgy (crafting armor and fortification)
Monarchy and Mining	○ Sulayman (pbuh): Monarchy, industrialist, artisan, and mining magnate
Baking and Food Processing	○ Dhul-Kifl (pbuh): Baking and food processing
Aquaculture and Fisheries Management	○ Yunus (pbuh): Aquaculture and fisheries management
Horticulture and Botany	○ Uzayr (pbuh): Botanical expertise
Medicine and Pharmaceuticals	○ Luqman (pbuh): Medical and pharmaceutical knowledge
Woodworking and Timber Technology	○ Zachariah (pbuh): Woodworking and timber technology
Islam (2010) and Shah (2021)	

4.2. Theme Two: Madrasah Graduates' key reflections after discussion with observation

Engaging in worldly work means a decrease in religious status.

As modern worldly education like science, technology, management, economics, etc is not taught in madrasahs, they are being deprived of real-life skills.

Serving in mosques and madrasahs as a religious duty is their Islamic root responsibility.

4.3. Theme Three: Hurdles and religious prejudices associated with acquiring the prophets' hard skills

The Prophets and Messengers made worldly skills part of their calling to the path of Allah. But the lion portion of graduates from madrasahs has limited themselves to serve mosques and madrasahs as Imams, Muezzins and teachers related duties, because the limitations of hard skill based education and environment with mentality have discouraged them from engaging in worldly activities. Behind the limitations of hard skills based education and environment with mentality, there are hurdles and religious prejudices associated with acquiring the prophets' hard skills.

4.3.1. Sub – theme one: Grouping among the Islamists, madrasah boards and madrasahs

Bangladeshi Islamists, divided into around 70 distinct factions, face significant ideological differences that prevent them from uniting and collaborating effectively (Riaz 2018). This fragmentation hampers their ability to consolidate efforts and remains evident in their separate Madrasah systems, each with its own curriculum designed to preserve its unique identity. The discord also manifests in verbal disputes, divisive literature, and even violence, including aggression and murder against rival factions. These conflicts obstruct the cohesive development of graduates and hinder the attainment of the Prophet's hard skills.

4.3.2. Sub- theme two: Conventional teaching and learning methods

Graduates from madrasahs often return to teach within the same system, which emphasizes theoretical studies and lacks practical or scientific training, leading to limited proficiency in scientific and technical fields (Shesheir, 2023). Ali et al. (2021) highlight that reliance on guidebooks and conventional teaching methods restricts their ability to enter mainstream job markets, confining them to roles within mosques and madrasahs. This cycle perpetuates a lack of practical skills, hindering the acquisition of the hard skills encouraged by the Prophets.

4.3.3. Sub –theme three: Commercial wazz mahfils

Islamist factions in Bangladesh organize fragmented wazz mehfiles to advance their ideologies, influenced by religious beliefs, doctrinal differences, and financial support from the Middle East (Shakeel, 2019). These events, shaped by divisions within major Islamic sects like Kawmi, Maza-Khanka, and Salafi, often feature inflammatory speeches that distort Quranic verses and Hadiths (Rahman, 2020). Many speakers criticize science and technology, portraying them as contrary to Islamic principles, and discourage scientific practice. Additionally, significant financial transactions during these gatherings provide a livelihood for participants, impeding their pursuit of practical skills advocated by the Prophets.

4.3.4. Sub –theme four: Bangladeshi priests' roles

In Bangladesh, some priests, instead of guiding their communities with integrity, engage in deceitful practices. BD Peoples Voice (2023) reported that two pirs from Charmonai misinterpret religion for personal gain, treating party funds as their own and excluding outsiders. This exploitation under the guise of religious duty raises concerns about the integrity of other pirs, who similarly fail to impart the practical skills advocated by the Prophets to their followers and madrasah graduates.

4.3.5. Sub- theme five: Conservative mind of Madrasah authorities

Madrasah graduates often view Islamic theology as separate from practical worldly skills, leading to isolation from essential everyday tasks. Husain (2007) criticized the madrasah system as outdated and unscientific, arguing it contradicts some teachings of the Prophet and is ill-suited for modern society. Foyzullah (2022) emphasized that both religious and worldly education are crucial, as demonstrated by early Muslim institutions like Zaytuna University in 737 AD. Despite this, madrasah authorities resist updating curricula to better prepare graduates for contemporary challenges.

4.3.6. Sub- theme six: Misinterpretations of the essence of the earthly activities

Madrasah graduates often dismiss earthly activities as worthless, focusing solely on eternal life. When asked why, they often respond that worldly pursuits have no value in the eyes of Allah and deteriorate one's faith. This belief, however, stems from a misinterpretation influenced by their environment rather than true Islamic teachings (Husain, 2007).

4.3.7. Sub-theme seven: Doing restriction of Islamic deeds and services in some specific sectors

Qawmi madrasahs and their graduates traditionally limit themselves to roles such as teaching in madrasahs, leading prayers as imams, performing the call to prayer as muazzins, engaging in mosque cleaning (khidmat), delivering speeches in religious gatherings (waz mehfiles) for compensation, and writing books (Foyzullah, 2022). When discussing these roles, graduates often reference the prophets and companions of Prophet Muhammad as examples. They argue that since all prophets were teachers and community leaders, they prefer teaching and serving as imams. They also cite companions like Bilal (R.A.), who served as muazzins and mosque caretakers, as inspirations for their roles. They view delivering speeches in religious gatherings as a noble profession, following the example of prophets and their companions who actively invited people to Allah and engaged in discussions about faith. Consequently, they believe that no other professions are as esteemed as these roles (Ali et al., 2021; Shakeel, 2019).

4.3.8. Sub-theme eight: Impact of religion traders

Religion traders are individuals who deliver speeches at religious gatherings for commercial purposes. Modern madrasahs often produce graduates who become such speakers and influence their peers. Shakeel (2019) highlighted that Islam in Bangladesh is practiced through five primary sects, each led by these "religion traders" who are prominent at Waz Mahfils. These sects include the Qawmi (aligned with Deoband teachings), the Aliya (focused on scholarly studies), shrine-centric groups, Jamaat or Maududibad followers, and Ahl al-Hadith or Salafi (La Majhabi). Additionally, four tariqas of Ilm Tasawwuf—Qaderia, Chishtia, Mujaddedia, and Naqshbandiyya—also influence these gatherings.

4.3.9. Sub- theme nine: Deeming earthly work as the barrier of entrance into paradise

Madrasa students see themselves as inheritors of the Prophets, who they believe avoided worldly activities, viewing the earthly realm as transient and obstructive to Paradise. When asked why they avoid earthly work, they respond that the Prophets and their companions focused solely on guiding people, not on worldly pursuits. They argue that those who rejected the Prophets were often enamored with the material world, so they strive to remain detached from it to stay on the path to Heaven.

4.3.10. Sub-theme ten: Making science and technology opponents of Islam

Azad (2017) reported Mufti Mahfuzul Haq's view on the Qaumi madrasah curriculum, which emphasizes Quran, Hadiths, and Islamic jurisprudence, and includes basic and advanced language instruction but largely excludes science and technology. Haq, vice president of Befakul Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh, indicated that these subjects are deemed irrelevant to eternal life. Similarly, Maymoon (2015) highlighted that "science and technology" are considered only relevant to worldly matters.

4.3.11. Sub- theme eleven: Division of education in the name of religious education and general education

The Madrasah system in Bangladesh is criticized for emphasizing "deeni education" (Islamic education) over practical skills for modern jobs. Foyzullah (2022) argues that Islam values both religious and worldly education, supported by Quranic verse 2:201, which encourages seeking goodness in both this world and the Hereafter.

4.4. Theme four: Examining the current job market scenario for the madrasah graduates in absence of hard skills

'Dawra-e-Hadith and 'Kamil' are the government recognized degrees for both Qwami and Aliya Madrasah graduates, who have lacks of practical and technical skills highly sought after in contemporary job markets. Consequently, they always struggle to compete and secure their positions in the mainstream job markets. Shaon and Mamun (2018) observed that after graduation, they typically find employment as imams, muezzins, or khadems at mosques, teachers at their respective madrasahs and speakers of waz mahfils. However, Shakeel (2021) highlighted that Aliya Madrasah graduates have a bit better positions in the job market than Qwami Madrasah graduates and Obaidullah & Hossain (2023) reported that female graduates experience greater difficulties not only their respective job sectors but also in the job market compared to their male counterparts.

4.5. Theme Five: Understandings necessary for the graduates

Islam values industrious and proactive individuals, discouraging idleness and dependency. Believers are motivated to excel, as emphasized in the Quran and Hadith. For instance, the Quran states that Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change themselves (Quran 13:11). In Al-Qasas at verse 26, the qualities of strength (hard skills) and trustworthiness in Prophet Musa (pbuh) are highlighted for employment, showing the Quran's emphasis on hard skills for success in the job market. Achieving such skills is not forbidden in Islam, where both religious and worldly knowledge are equally valued (Foyzullah, 2022).

He (2022) furthermore mentioned Imam Abu Yusuf, who stated that a Maulana who lacks general education, despite religious knowledge, is ultimately ignorant and unwise. This highlights the importance of being aware of contemporary circumstances. Similarly, Redditor (2021) referenced King Sultan Suleyman's requirements for an Imam at the Grand Mosque in Istanbul, which included both soft and hard skills such as communication in multiple languages and practical knowledge in various disciplines.

Islam, as a religion of balance, underscores the need for both hard and soft skills for a well-rounded human resource. However, graduates from madrasahs often lack this balance, despite claiming to be heirs of the Prophets. They should reflect on the principles that lagging behind are not characteristic of a believer (Quran 9:87), that Allah values diligent effort (Quran 25:2) and expects efficiency (Quran 67:2), and that the pursuit of scientific and technological knowledge is divinely ordained (Quran 8:60). Hard skills are essential for success in competitive job markets (Quran

62:10), alleviating poverty, reducing dependency, and demonstrating integrity, as exemplified by the Messengers and Prophets.

5. Conclusion

The significance of hard skills is underscored in the Quran, which emphasizes their essential role in achieving dignity and self-sufficiency. According to Quran 2:201, Allah instructs His followers to seek success both in this life and the hereafter, noting that dignity and a respectable status can be maintained through hard skills that ensure halal income. Additionally, Quran 28:26 categorizes skills into hard skills, which imply strength, and soft skills, such as trustworthiness, highlighting that the Prophets exemplified hard skills first and soft skills second.

In contrast, there is a notable disparity in educational practices regarding these skills. Many institutions, such as universities in the Middle East, effectively integrate both hard and soft skills. However, tertiary madrasahs in Bangladesh, such as Darul Uloom Hathazari and Darul Uloom Potiya, predominantly focus on the soft skills of the Prophets, often under the guise of stoicism and detachment from worldly occupations while resisting science and technology. Although government-run madrasahs, like Aliya Madrasah, are making efforts to incorporate both hard and soft skills, their progress remains inadequate. This discrepancy highlights the hurdles and contemporary religious prejudices affecting the integration of hard skills within madrasah education.

Looking ahead, the 4th industrial revolution, characterized by advancements in science, technology, engineering, and innovation, is set to reshape the job market significantly. Moinuddin (2019), referencing Professor Klaus Schwab, points out that previous industrial revolutions have left substantial gaps, such as the lack of electricity for 17% of the global population and the absence of internet access for approximately half of the world's people. This context underscores the disadvantage faced by madrasah graduates, who lack the hard skills needed to compete effectively in this evolving job market, thereby aligning with the aim of examining the current job market scenario and motivating madrasah graduates to acquire these essential skills.

6. Recommendations

‘Hard skills are the requisite to be human resources has been mentioned in the sura Al-Kasas (Quran, 28:26) and human resources are the main driving factors of a country’s development. However, these skills are not seen practically in the day –to-day activities of the graduates compared to the students of public university and colleges as well as other specialized institutions. Therefore, ‘madrasah graduates ought to be brought for hard skills’ is a Prophetic demand because all Prophets had hard skills. For this, the following recommendations should be regarded highly by the concerned authorities.

- i) **Curriculum Integration and Standardization:** The government could enhance madrasah education by mandating the inclusion of literature on the hard skills of the Prophets at all levels, thereby aligning religious teachings with practical

skills. To ensure this integration is effective and consistent, the Bangladesh Ministry of Religious Affairs could establish an oversight committee composed of ministry secretaries, director generals, Islamic scholars, and university professors. This committee would regulate the implementation of these hard skills programs, standardizing the curriculum and accreditation across madrasahs to align educational outcomes with national standards and promote uniformity.

- ii) **Teacher Training and Collaboration with Technical Institutes:** The government could establish a specialized training institute in partnership with model mosques to promote practical skills development and foster creativity within an Islamic framework. Concurrently, collaborative efforts between prominent madrasahs and Islamic universities, both nationally and internationally, such as the Islamic University in Kustia and King Abdulaziz University, could set up research wings within major madrasahs. This dual approach would not only enhance teacher training and professional development but also enrich the educational landscape, providing madrasah students with recognized qualifications and opportunities for academic advancement and research.
- iii) **Career Counseling, Job Placement, and Community Engagement:** Convening round table conferences, seminars, and similar gatherings at the district level, hosted by model mosques, would facilitate engagement between madrasahs and relevant stakeholders on both national and international scales. These events would not only connect madrasah students with potential employers and industry professionals to enhance job placement opportunities and career counseling efforts but also foster broader community and industry involvement. This approach would help ensure that madrasah education remains aligned with local and global job markets, addressing current and future employment needs and promoting a dynamic relationship between education and industry.
- iv) **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Managing Conservatism:** The Bangladesh Ministry of Religious Affairs could establish an oversight committee composed of ministry secretaries, director generals, Islamic scholars, and university professors to regulate and monitor the implementation of hard skills education across madrasahs. This committee would ensure curriculum standardization and play a crucial role in evaluating program effectiveness, making necessary adjustments to enhance educational outcomes. Simultaneously, the government must exercise vigilance and tact to manage potential resistance from conservative elements within the madrasah community. Addressing this resistance through careful implementation and ongoing engagement is essential to the success of these educational reforms and to ensure continuous improvement.

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