

Japan's Contribution to Bangladesh's Human Resource Development

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Abstract

Japan has been a time-tested partner of Bangladesh in terms of its human resource development, as well as many other development areas. Bangladesh's demographic dividend offers immense future possibilities, but improper utilisation could lead to demographic disaster and hinder progress in various sectors. Taking all these into account, this qualitative study evaluates the initiatives taken by Japan for human resource development in Bangladesh. The major findings of the study portray that Japan has been cooperating with Bangladesh in higher education through several scholarship programmes, providing work opportunities to young Bangladeshi citizens in several mega projects in Bangladesh (e.g., the Matarbari project, the MRT project), and so on. However, there are some issues in Bangladesh, such as a lack of proper measures to establish industry-academia relationships and a lack of proper utilisation of the TVET programmes, as well as some considerable differences between Bangladeshi people's and Japanese people's mindsets due to different cultural and moral backgrounds. If these obstacles are effectively dealt with, great opportunities lie ahead for Bangladesh. On the basis of these findings, this study recommends that Bangladesh should take effective measures to benefit from Japan's relaxed visa policies; drastic changes need to be introduced in Bangladesh's work culture; and effective measures should be taken to remove all the obstacles facing Japanese human resource initiatives.

Key words: Human resource development, Bangladesh, Japan, contribution, initiatives, challenges, determining factors.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is blessed with a massive human resource that can play a substantial role in the country's overall development endeavour. At present, the total population of Bangladesh stands at around 174 million, with a progressive growth rate of 1.03%, which is astonishing.¹ The more amazing factor here is that the majority of this population is comprised of young people, offering immense potential for the

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¹ World Population Review, *Bangladesh population live, 2024*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bangladesh-population>

developing nation. Japan has been a steadfast development partner of Bangladesh in terms of facilitating this massive working-age populace right from the beginning. For instance, shortly after Bangladesh's inception, Japan began to send a group of volunteers, known as JOCVs (Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers), to the rural areas of Bangladesh. Japan sent a total of 1212 JOCVs to Bangladesh from 1973 to 2014.² These Japanese volunteers contributed immensely to the human resource development in the rural areas of Bangladesh by empowering them through technical training and practical work experience in several fields. Japan also initiated training programmes for Bangladeshi government officials from several ministries. These officials are selected by the government of Bangladesh based on their merits and prospects and are then sent to Japan on long-term or short-term training programmes. Furthermore, Japan offers technical training opportunities to young Bangladeshi citizens, and after successfully completing these training programmes, these young people contribute considerably to Bangladesh's economy. Another highly important sector that Japan has been contributing to is the education sector. Japan has long been offering generous scholarship opportunities to talented students and scholars who pursue higher studies in Japan. These scholarship programmes cover undergraduate programmes, master's programmes, and PhD programmes at highly reputed Japanese universities.

Japan has been playing the role of a major development partner for Bangladesh through various sorts of assistance and mutual cooperation. This includes several types of grants, Official Development Assistance (ODA), direct investments, as well as public-private partnerships (PPP) in several flagship HRD projects, G2G (government-to-government) programmes, technical and technological assistance, and so on.³ For instance, among all the development partners in the world, Japan ranks at the top in terms of providing foreign assistance to Bangladesh.⁴ Consequently, Bangladesh is making significant progress in terms of the human resource development index and has now become an emerging hub for foreign trade and investments.⁵ Just recently, Bangladesh successfully graduated from the list of

² Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Activities in Bangladesh: JICA volunteers*, n.d., <https://www.jica.go.jp/bangladesh/english/activities/activity05.html>

³ H. Shazzad, '50 Years of Japan-Bangladesh Ties: From Economic to Strategic Partnership', *The Diplomat*, 10 February, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/50-years-of-japan-bangladesh-ties-from-economic-to-strategic-partnership/>; '50th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations: Japan's Invaluable Role in the Development of Bangladesh', *The Business Standard*, 10 February, 2022, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/50th-anniversary-diplomatic-relations-japans-invaluable-role-development-bangladesh-368941>

⁴ Economic Relations Division: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Foreign assistance scenario*, 2022, <https://erd.gov.bd/site/page/9a23bb25-5ff7-421b-8a73-b7c6b33c8032/Foreign-Aid-Scenario-2020-21>

⁵ M. H. Manik, 'Movement of the economy of Bangladesh with its sector-wise contribution and growth rate', *Journal of Production, Operations Management and Economics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2023, pp. 1-8; R. A. M. Titumir, 'Numbers and Narratives in Bangladesh's Economic Development', *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2021.

LDCs (Least Developed Countries) by repeatedly fulfilling the necessary criteria (The Daily Star, 2021).⁶ Provided the ongoing development spree goes according to plan, Bangladesh will be officially declared out of this LDC category by 2026.⁷ Furthermore, Bangladesh now aims to become a developed state by 2041 and hopes to become a major player in the upcoming Fourth Industrial Revolution.⁸ To achieve this goal and effectively utilise the fruits of LDC graduation, Bangladesh needs to build a massive workforce of highly skilled professionals. However, there are still some gaps in terms of properly utilising the assistance that Bangladesh receives from Japan. In order to maintain absolute progress, accountability and transparency must be ensured right from the planning stages to the root levels.⁹ Ensuring the effectiveness of Japanese assistance is closely related to the mutual trust between Japan and Bangladesh.¹⁰ This study discusses the existing HRD (human resource development) initiatives conducted by Japan in Bangladesh, the challenges that are being faced by these activities, possible future prospects that these initiatives offer, notable factors behind the sustainability of these programmes, and so on. On this backdrop, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the initiatives and strategies undertaken by Japan for human resource development in Bangladesh?
2. What are the challenges concerning Japan's efforts toward the development of human resources in Bangladesh?

2. Literature Review

Japanese initiatives for Bangladesh's human resource development have been crucially important for the developing country. Bangladesh now receives the highest amount of ODA contribution from the Japanese side. A significant portion of this ODA support is targeted toward Bangladesh's human resource development.¹¹ Japan

⁶ 'Bangladesh Qualifies for LDC Graduation: The Beginning of the End', *The Daily Star*, 26 Feb. 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bangladesh-qualifies-ldc-graduation-the-beginning-the-end-2051333>

⁷ 'Transition Strategy Crucial for LDC Graduation Without a Hitch', *Dhaka Tribune*, 1 March, 2021, <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/business/economy/2021/03/01/transition-strategy-crucial-for-ldc-graduation-without-a-hitch>; 'Booming Bangladesh Sets Off to Graduate Leaving the LDC Category', *The Business Standard*, 26 December, 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/booming-bangladesh-sets-graduate-leaving-ldc-category-349024>

⁸ M. A. R. Nile, 'Preparing Bangladesh for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)', *The Daily Star*, 15 February, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/296wv9kc>

⁹ M. G. Quibria and A. Islam, 'The case study of aid effectiveness in Bangladesh: Development with governance challenges', *Social Science Research Network*, 2015, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2589930

¹⁰ S. Y. Saadat, 'Bangladesh-Japan Partnership for the Next Development Journey', *Centre for Policy Dialogue*, 2022, <https://cpd.org.bd/resources/2022/03/Presentation-on-Bangladesh-Japan-Partnership-for-the-Next-Development-Journey.pdf>

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Evaluation on Japan's education cooperation policy 2015-2020*, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/FY2021/pdfs/education_cooperation_policy.pdf; H. Shazzad, '50 Years of Japan-Bangladesh Ties: From Economic to

has been working hand-in-hand with Bangladesh in graduating the LDC category without difficulty.¹² Both Japan and Bangladesh have massive demand for skilled human resources, but for different reasons. Japan is now facing unrecoverable population shrinkage, and for keeping its huge industries running, it's in need of a massive foreign workforce. On the other hand, Bangladesh is aiming to become a developed nation in the near future, and for this reason, Bangladesh has a huge demand for skilled workers.¹³ Japan mostly seeks skilled workers for its blue-collar job positions. At present, generally three types of Bangladeshi people living in Japan are engaged in blue-collar jobs: technical interns, specialised skilled workers, and students.¹⁴ Japan has been offering Bangladesh numerous scholarship opportunities for the scholars and students, training programmes for government officials and general citizens, collaboration in the field of human resource development, and so on. However, once Bangladesh officially graduates from the LDC (Least Developed Countries) category, the amount and nature of assistance coming from the Japanese side may be altered.¹⁵

2.1 The Necessity of HRD in Developing Countries

Without ensuring proper development and nurturing of human resources, a country can never progress in a true sense. A study shows that all the countries that have successfully become industrial powers were also successful in producing a skilled workforce first.¹⁶ Human capital development is all about ensuring productivity and enhancing performance in a sustainable manner. HRD (human resource development) is a clear indicator of whether a country is effectively progressive or not.¹⁷ A

Strategic Partnership', *The Diplomat*, 10 February, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/50-years-of-japan-bangladesh-ties-from-economic-to-strategic-partnership/>

¹² R. Islam, 'Japan to Support Bangladesh's Smooth Graduation from LDC', *The Business Standard*, 26 April, 2023, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/japan-support-bangladeshs-smooth-graduation-ldc-622542>

¹³ 'Japan Provides \$25 Million Grant Aid for Human Resources Development in Bangladesh', *Daily Sun*, 23 December, 2021, <https://www.daily-sun.com/post/595346/Japan-provides-25-million-grant-aid-for-human-resources-development-in-Bangladesh>

¹⁴ M. S. Akon *et al.*, 'Japan's new immigration policy: Prospects and challenges for Bangladeshi workers', *Bangladesh Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2022, pp. 67-88. <https://rb.gy/j2o02e>

¹⁵ R. Islam, 'Japan to Support Bangladesh's Smooth Graduation from LDC', *The Business Standard*, 26 April, 2023, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/japan-support-bangladeshs-smooth-graduation-ldc-622542>; A. M. Mazid, 'The Building Blocks of Bangladesh-Japan Diplomatic Relations', *The Business Standard*, 10 February, 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/building-blocks-bangladesh-japan-diplomatic-relations-199429>

¹⁶ B. A. Mostafa, 'Human resource development within the sustainability science framework', *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2023, pp. 199-220. <https://www.doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2023.v12n1p199>

¹⁷ K. Piwowar-Sulej, 'Human resources development as an element of sustainable HRM with the focus on production engineers', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 2020

developing country needs effectively working manpower so that it can properly run its industries and other sectors. To ensure that the workforce is capable enough to handle the required tasks, it's mandatory that they are technically, technologically, and psychologically sound. Effective policymaking by the government is the key in this regard.¹⁸ Academicians, skilled officials, technical professionals, IT experts, skilled workers—they are all considered as human capital. In this era, to properly ensure sustainable development in all aspects, a developing country has no alternative to nurturing these professionals.¹⁹

2.2 Educational Cooperation Concerning Bangladesh's Human Resource Development

Japan has been consistently assisting Bangladesh in its education sector. In 2021 alone, Japan contributed 500 million yen to the development of primary education programmes in Bangladesh. However, Japan's most notable contributions to Bangladesh's education sector are its generous scholarship programmes focused on the higher education segment. The MEXT programme and the JDS programme are two of these scholarship programmes. In the JDS programme alone, the Japanese government contributed around 460 million yen in the last few years.²⁰ Japan has been consistently cooperating with Bangladesh to increase the inclusion tendency of students at the primary education level. Consequently, in 2018, the inclusion rate at the primary education level has reached 98%. Practical subjects, such as science, English, and mathematics, are mainly the point of focus from the Japanese side. More than a hundred thousand primary school teachers have received training organised by the GoB and JICA up until now.²¹ Each year, a significant number of Bangladeshi scholars go to Japan under several scholarship programmes and exchange programmes. Some of these programmes include the MEXT programme, JASSO programme, ADB-JSP programme, JENESYS programme, and so on. These talented scholars will most likely work as a bridge between Japan and Bangladesh through

¹⁸ E. Khan, A. Lashari and N. Iqbal, 'Stakeholders' development: A paradigm shift of human resource development (HRD)', *Global Management Journal for Academic & Corporate Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2022, pp. 123-137, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367190175_Stakeholders%27_Development_A_Paradigm_Shift_of_Human_Resource_Development_HRD

¹⁹ Y. Jia, 'Analysis of human resource development and management in regional economic development', *Proceedings of Business and Economic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 5, 2022, <https://ojs.bbwpublisher.com/index.php/PBES/article/view/4409>

²⁰ M. J. Alam, 'Bangladesh-Japan Diplomatic Relations (1972-2022): A New Paradigm of Strategic Partnership', *MuktoBuddhi Publishers*, 2022a

²¹ M. J. Alam, 'Japan's contribution to Bangladesh: Aspirations for inclusive development and regional cooperation', *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2022b, p. 150; Japan International Cooperation Agency, *JICA support program 3 for strengthening mathematics and science education in primary education project*, n.d., <https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/project/english/bangladesh/008/outline/index.html>

sharing culture, lifestyles, ethical values, customs, knowledge, and so on.²² Findings show that the majority of the teachers in prominent Bangladeshi public universities, and even many of the private universities as well, are former scholarship grantees from Japan, and they are highly talented and well equipped with valuable skill sets. With the knowledge obtained in Japan, they are now making significant contributions to Bangladesh's higher education sector and research areas.²³

Figure 1: Study Opportunities in Japan



Source: Created by the authors

2.3 Efforts Toward Capacity Enhancement of the Bangladeshi Professionals

Japan is working on capacity enhancement in various ways. Through JICA, Japan has been extending higher education opportunities to Bangladeshi government officials under the JDS (The Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship) scholarship. Selected prospective officials representing all ministries and government organisations get this lucrative opportunity. Some of these notable organisations are NBR (National Board of Revenue), BIDA (Bangladesh Investment Development

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Evaluation of human resource development in the area of development and supporting development education*, 2014, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/FY2013/pdfs/hr.pdf>

²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Evaluation on Japan's education cooperation policy 2015-2020*, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/evaluation/FY2021/pdfs/education_cooperation_policy.pdf

Authority), BEZA (Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority), etc.²⁴ Apart from this initiative, many officials are also sent to Japan on intensive short-term training programmes. The KCCP (Knowledge Co-Creation Programme) initiative is among these, and it is contributing immensely to creating a bridge between Japan and Bangladesh.²⁵ Japan collaborates closely with some Bangladeshi institutions and organisations and provides support for their capacity enhancement as well. Renowned institutions like the DJS (Department of Japanese Studies) and IML (Institute of Modern Languages) of the University of Dhaka, Japanese communities and schools in Bangladesh, BIA (Bangladesh Ikebana Association), BAAS (Bangladesh AOTS Alumni Society), JUAAB (Japanese Universities Alumni Association in Bangladesh), etc., receive direct assistance from Japan.²⁶ Quite recently, Japan started receiving applications from Bangladeshi citizens for its JET Programme (the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme). This initiative will ensure lucrative job opportunities in the education sector of Japan for those who have excellent proficiency in English. This offers great prospects to the Bangladeshi skilled professionals.²⁷

Figure 2: JET Programme



Source: Created by the authors

2.4 Effectiveness of Japan's HRD Activities in Bangladesh

A study finds that Japan's assistance in developing Bangladesh's human capital has been significantly effective. For example, Japanese initiatives concerning the polytechnic education system had a big impact. The growth of human resources

²⁴ Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, *Bangladeshi officials will advance their ability through Japanese Development Scholarship*, 2022, https://www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00618.html

²⁵ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Acceptance of technical training participants: The Knowledge Co-Creation Program (KCCP)*, n.d., https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/english/our_work/types_of_assistance/tech/acceptance/training/index.html

²⁶ S. Chowdhury, 'A New Turning Point in Bangladesh-Japan Ties?', *The Daily Star*, 19 April, 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/new-turning-point-bangladesh-japan-ties-3300876>

²⁷ Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, *Call for application: The 2023 Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program*, 2023, https://www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00670.html

across a number of industries, including engineering, agriculture, and healthcare, has been facilitated by the technical education system, which has been instrumental in delivering technical education and training to students.²⁸ Furthermore, Japan's support for the creation of vocational training facilities in Bangladesh has been successful in raising young people's employability. A significant number of Bangladeshi workers are now working for various companies in Japan. Many Bangladeshi citizens are working on several big projects in Bangladesh as well.²⁹ Several of Japan's HRD support projects in Bangladesh have been successful, but there are still some issues that require to be resolved. The lack of coordination among the respective stakeholders is one of the biggest problems Japan is now facing. Inefficiency in the execution of development initiatives in Bangladesh is a result of a lack of coordination among the stakeholders. This is hampering the expected effectiveness of Japanese HRD initiatives in Bangladesh.³⁰ Japan also has to contend with Bangladeshi institutions' meagre capacity for absorption. Many Bangladeshi institutions have a constrained capacity for taking in new resources, leading to inefficient use of development aid and reduced the effectiveness of the nation's development projects.³¹ Thus, to improve Bangladeshi institutions' ability to successfully absorb and use development aid, Japan needs to reevaluate these issues.

3. Methodology

This study seeks to provide an in-depth overview regarding the involvement of Japan in Bangladesh's human resource development throughout the years. Numerous literature and web materials had been assessed for this research, and after evaluating all the literature and relevant documents at hand, this research adopted a qualitative framework. This is because qualitative research places emphasis on linguistic expressions with a particular focus on human perspectives within a dynamic social environment.³² The research philosophy that this study adopted was interpretivism. This is because interpretivism allows a study to uphold multiple points of view

²⁸ A. M. Mazid, 'Japanese Participation in the Development of Bangladesh', *The Independent*, 13 February, 2018, <https://m.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/137022>

²⁹ IM Japan, *IM Japan's technical intern training program: Agreements with governments of sending countries*, n.d., <https://imm.or.jp/en/program/gov.html>

³⁰ M. J. Alam, 'Japan's role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh: A review', *Arts Faculty Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 17, 2023, pp. 51-71, <https://rb.gy/lfiopc>; M. G. Quibria and A. Islam, 'The case study of aid effectiveness in Bangladesh: Development with governance challenges', *Social Science Research Network*, 2015, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2589930

³¹ M. A. Khan, 'Situation Analysis of Bangladesh TVET Sector: A Background Work for a TVET Swap', *International Labour Organization*, 2019, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_735704.pdf

³² A. Bryman and E. Bell, 'Business Research Methods (4th ed.)', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

regarding one single event or topic, and this can be crucial for producing more elaborate ideas about what is actually going on. Moreover, this study adopted an inductive research approach to generate new speculations or to reinforce pre-existing ones.³³ As this research necessitated a thorough evaluation of Japan's role in the development of human resources in Bangladesh, it was imperative to pose enquiries pertaining to the mechanisms and motivations underlying them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the events. The presence of "how" or "why" enquiries suggested a limited ability to exert influence over the observed phenomena and a pragmatic comprehension of the existing circumstances. Therefore, a research approach utilising a case study methodology that was consistent with both interpretivism and inductive investigation was applied in this research. To attain a more fruitful outcome from this research, three techniques were utilised for the data collection process, which were interviews, documentation, and web surfing.

Figure 03: Methodology of this Research



Source: Created by the authors

3.1 Research Procedures and Protocols

- a. The initial procedure entailed the conduction of an extensive literature review and the formulation of a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire for the KIIs (Key Informant Interviews).

³³ A. Bryman and E. Bell, 'Business Research Methods (4th ed.)', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

- b. Interviewees were carefully chosen through purposive sampling and were sent formal invitations for the interviews through email.
- c. Participant information sheets along with informed consent forms were prepared and provided to each of the selected interviewees beforehand.
- d. All the KIIs (Key Informant Interviews) were arranged strictly abiding by the interview protocols.
- e. After conducting the interviews, all the accumulated interview data were carefully transcribed into a written format. All the transcribed contents were then further categorised and analysed accordingly.
- f. All the documented primary data were further cross-checked to ensure absolute authenticity and credibility.
- g. Both primary and secondary data were then carefully utilised in formulating the findings of the research as well as the policy recommendations.
- h. Throughout the study, ethical considerations were strictly maintained to ensure the integrity of this research work.

3.2 Sample Selection

This research purposively interviewed scholars, government and non-government officials in Bangladesh, Japanese companies and business associates in Bangladesh, officials of JETRO (Dhaka), officials of JICA (Bangladesh), and experts who possessed extensive knowledge on Japan's involvement in Bangladesh's overall human resource development. The prime agenda was to thoroughly assess the current situation of Japan's engagement in HRD initiatives in Bangladesh as well as the key opportunities and challenges. After arranging 16 in-depth interviews (KIIs), the study reached its saturation point. The interviewees represented the Department of Japanese Studies (University of Dhaka), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, National Bureau of Revenue (NBR)-Bangladesh, NewVision Solutions Ltd., Bangladesh Ikebana Association (BIA), Bangladesh AOTS Alumni Society (BAAS), Japanese Universities Alumni Association in Bangladesh (JUAAB), Japan-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JBCCI), Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS), Kokorozashi & Kazuko-Bhuiyan Japanese Cultural Centre, and Kaicom Solutions. A list of the interviewees is attached as an annex.

Table 1: Category of the Interviewees

Sl.	Category	Number of Interviewees
1	Scholars and Researchers	1
2	Government and Non-Government Officials in Bangladesh	5
3	Officials of the JETRO Dhaka Office	3
4	Officials of the JICA Bangladesh Office	2
5	Japanese Companies and Business Associates in Bangladesh	5
Total		16

Source: Created by the authors

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

This study implemented a series of semi-structured, open-ended interviews to collect primary data. A total of 16 thorough interviews (Key Informant Interviews: KIIs) were conducted in this regard. All the interviewees were selected through purposive sampling, and all of them possessed significant expertise in the relevant field. The interviews included both face-to-face and online ones, and all the interviews were arranged and conducted in a very formal manner. As for the document analysis and web surfing methods, numerous secondary sources of data had been studied and critically analysed by the authors. The sources of information documented encompassed a wide range of mediums, such as articles, chapter excerpts, books, reports, scholarly journals, newspaper clips, web pages, and so on.

3.4 Attention to Ethics

Abiding by the ethical rules is a key to producing valid and firm research work, and so the authors paid their utmost attention to them. As for web surfing and document analysis, proper ethical guidelines had been maintained by the authors. Proper citations had been used for all the data collected through these data collection methods. As for the interviews (KII), the utmost formality and ideal regulations had been maintained throughout the procedures. All the interviewees had been initially contacted through formal email invitations to the interview procedures. A participant information sheet containing all the details about the research work had been provided to all the interviewees. As there was some exchange of sensitive information during the interview sessions, it was carefully maintained that the interview environment was safe and comfortable enough for the participants. Furthermore, all the information received in these interview sessions was verified by checking relevant online databases in order to produce solid research work with the utmost commitment. Aside from these measures, the following protocols had been maintained during all the interviews:

- a. The authors had made sure to keep every single piece of personal information confidential. The use of pseudonyms had ensured the masking of the interviewees' identities.
- b. While conducting the interviews, the authors made sure to prevent all sorts of bias. The interviewees conveyed all the information according to their own free will.
- c. The utmost sincerity and respect had been maintained toward the interviewees throughout the procedures.
- d. No harm was caused by any of the procedures used in this research. All sorts of potential risks had been avoided by paying maximum attention to all the details.
- e. The interviewees voluntarily participated in the interview sessions, and their informed consent to the matter was ensured by the authors. All the interviewees had been offered the right to withdraw at any moment.

4. Findings

4.1 Future Prospects of Japan's HRD Initiatives in Bangladesh

Considering the increasing number of development initiatives taken by the Japanese side in Bangladesh, it can be inarguably claimed that there are a lot of future prospects concerning Japan's human capital development initiatives in Bangladesh. After carefully analysing numerous secondary sources and the data retrieved from the interviews conducted, a number of prospects regarding Japanese HRD programmes in Bangladesh can be outlined as follows:

- a. In the past, the number of students going to Japan with scholarships was quite limited. However, at present, around 200 Bangladeshi students go to Japan annually under several scholarship programmes.³⁴ The number of Japanese scholarship grantees from Bangladesh is increasing significantly. This indicates that Bangladeshi students may receive a larger number of scholarship opportunities in the near future.³⁵
- b. Quite recently, Japan has relaxed its visa policy in order to tackle its demographic crisis. Also, work permits in Japan are easier to obtain at present. This is a great opportunity for Bangladesh. Specifically, Japan needs a huge number of caregivers for its elderly population, and Bangladesh can be a major source of a workforce in this regard.³⁶

³⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The white paper on development cooperation 2021: Japan's international cooperation*, 2021, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100497686.pdf>

³⁵ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 7, June 2023

³⁶ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 15, September 2024; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 9, October 2023

- c. In recent years, the mutual collaboration between Japanese and Bangladeshi universities has increased significantly, and several exchange programmes are being conducted each year as well. This holds great prospects for academic cooperation and scholarly contributions to both countries' education and research sectors.³⁷
- d. For the first time ever, the JET programme is now open to Bangladeshi citizens. This is a golden opportunity for Bangladeshi people who have excellent proficiency in English and previous teaching experience. At present, only the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) positions are being offered to Bangladeshi citizens, but there is a possibility that in the near future, other positions under the JET programme will also be offered to Bangladeshi applicants.³⁸
- e. After several years, the JOCV programme is in effect once again, and this holds great prospects for Bangladesh's rural human capital development.³⁹
- f. Recently, a big fund of approximately USD 3.5 million has been allocated by Japan for the human resource development of Bangladesh through JICA, and the utilisation and outcomes of this fund will be visible in the next five years. This investment, like many other investments being made by Japan in Bangladesh, will be crucial for the country's development measures.⁴⁰

4.2 Possible Factors Behind the Sustainability of Japan's HRD Initiatives in Bangladesh

After evaluating and cross-examining the data collected from numerous secondary resources and interviews (KII), a number of probable factors can be outlined regarding the sustainability of Japanese human capital development efforts in Bangladesh. These factors are outlined as follows:

- a. Educational cooperation is the key to sustaining Japanese HRD efforts in Bangladesh. Bangladeshi citizens have been receiving a good number of Japanese scholarships for several decades now, and at present, Bangladesh is also one of the major recipients of Japanese scholarships.⁴¹ Continuing this trend

³⁷ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 1, May 2023

³⁸ KII, No. 2, May 2023; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 3, May 2023

³⁹ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 8, October 2023; Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Activities in Bangladesh: JICA volunteers*, n.d., <https://www.jica.go.jp/bangladesh/english/activities/activity05.html>

⁴⁰ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 3, May 2023; 'Japan to Provide \$3.41M to Bangladesh for Human Resource Development', *The Business Standard*, 26 October, 2022, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/japan-provide-341m-bangladesh-human-resource-development-520378>

⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The white paper on development cooperation 2020: Japan's international cooperation*, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100343083.pdf>

will be a highly important factor in sustaining Japanese HRD initiatives in the long run.⁴²

- b. Although Japan and Bangladesh share a strong mutual and strategic relationship, there are some cultural differences between the two countries. To mitigate this gap, maintaining consistency in cultural exchange programmes and establishing people-to-people connections will be crucial.⁴³
- c. Close collaborations between Japanese and Bangladeshi stakeholders can heavily influence the sustainability of Japanese HRD efforts in Bangladesh. Prominent organisations such as the DJS (Department of Japanese Studies) and IML (Institute of Modern Languages) of the University of Dhaka, AOTS (The Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships), JBCCI (Japan-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry), JBCCEC (Japan-Bangladesh Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation), etc., need to perform a highly proactive role in this regard.⁴⁴
- d. Introducing some necessary policy reforms on the Bangladeshi side can further facilitate Japan's initiatives in this country. Ensuring a systematic work culture, abolishing corruption at the grass-roots level, ensuring absolute transparency and accountability, relaxing tax and customs duties for Japanese companies, mitigating the issue of frequent transfers of Bangladeshi government officials, etc., can be quite effective in this regard.⁴⁵
- e. Putting more emphasis on technical training by the Bangladeshi government will enhance the TVET-based HRD programmes conducted by Japan. Japan can be a major destination for Bangladesh's labour force if Bangladesh can equip its young workers with the necessary skill sets.⁴⁶
- f. Maintaining political stability is highly important for Bangladesh. Japan is a peace-loving nation, and it only engages in business and investments when there's a sense of security in the destination country. Therefore, it is in Bangladesh's best interests to ensure political stability and national integrity at all times.⁴⁷

4.3 Key Challenges Facing Japan's HRD Initiatives in Bangladesh

In spite of mutual collaboration from both the Bangladeshi and Japanese sides, it is often seen that Japan's HRD initiatives are faced with several unexpected challenges. Almost all these challenges arise from Bangladeshi stakeholders, and to ensure the

⁴² KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 1, May 2023

⁴³ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 10, August 2024

⁴⁴ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 9, October 2023

⁴⁵ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 16, September 2024

⁴⁶ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 5, June 2023

⁴⁷ KII, No. 14, September 2024; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 6, June 2023

maximum effectiveness of such important projects, it is highly necessary that all obstacles and challenges are mitigated at all costs. While conducting interviews and analysing numerous sources, a number of challenges have been discovered in this study. These challenges are discussed as follows:

- a. Regarding technical education, there are still some issues with the Bangladeshi people's mindsets. Many people are still not interested in technical and vocational training. This mentality toward vocational training is a major obstacle to the proper utilization of Japan's TITP (Technical Intern Training Programme) and other TVET-related programmes.⁴⁸
- b. The existing education system in Bangladesh is much outdated in comparison to that of developed nations. Consequently, a considerable number of young Bangladeshi citizens have grown up with inadequate digital literacy and pitiful industry-centric knowledge. Without bringing in some significant reforms in the overall education system, Bangladesh won't be able to fully realise the effectiveness of Japanese HRD initiatives.⁴⁹
- c. There is a dilemma regarding government jobs in Bangladesh. Most of the youth are more interested in such jobs, especially the administrative ones, as there's better job security for them with less work experience or skill sets. Consequently, a significant portion of the young population is depriving themselves of lucrative private job opportunities, and this is creating a loophole in the job sector. This trend is a major obstacle for Japanese initiatives regarding human resource development in Bangladesh.⁵⁰
- d. The trend of frequent transfers of Bangladeshi government officials is another challenge for Japanese HRD initiatives. When government officials return to Bangladesh after completing their training programmes in Japan, it's often observed that a significant number of these officials are transferred to different departments or ministries. This frequent act of transferring trained officials actually hampers the proper implementation of their attained knowledge and experience.⁵¹
- e. Sometimes, it's observed that some Bangladeshi government officials consider the exclusive training programmes some sort of pleasure trip, and they don't focus on learning proactively. This mentality negatively affects the prime objectives of the overall initiative. This is also a crucial challenge, and the government of Bangladesh needs to work boldly on this matter.⁵²

⁴⁸ KII, No. 1, May 2023; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 8, October 2023

⁴⁹ KII, No. 1, May 2023; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 6, June 2023

⁵⁰ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 13, August 2024

⁵¹ KII, No. 2, May 2023; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 4, June 2023

⁵² KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 15, September 2024; KII, , No. 4, June 2023

- f. Brain drain is a major challenge for the Bangladeshi government. A considerable number of students who pursue higher studies in Japan don't return to Bangladesh once they complete their degrees. As a result, Bangladesh loses a considerable portion of its skilled and talented workforce. This scenario can be quite problematic for the country's development goals.⁵³
- g. Due to policy differences in various fields on both sides, effective utilisation of Japanese HRD initiatives cannot always be realised. Because of heavy taxes and customs duties, Japanese investment in Bangladesh is often faced with difficulties. Ensuring flexibility in necessary areas is a big challenge for Bangladesh.⁵⁴
- h. In Bangladesh, there is a lack of work opportunities that are suitable for the technical interns once they complete their training programmes. Japan basically provides training opportunities to Bangladeshi citizens voluntarily. It is for the government of Bangladesh to ensure relevant work opportunities and job placements for the trained human resources so that these bilateral initiatives can be better utilised and effectively realised.⁵⁵
- i. Corruption and the trend of speed money in Bangladesh pose considerable difficulties for the Japanese side. The Japanese people believe in a systematic work culture and absolute honesty. Corruption in the administrative and other functional bodies of the authority in Bangladesh only sends a bad image to Japanese stakeholders.⁵⁶
- j. In Bangladesh, there is still a serious lack of proper work environments and adequate facilitation in many sectors. Among many of the Bangladeshi stakeholders (government officials, technical trainees, etc.), a lack of a systematic and professional approach toward work, a lack of sincerity and ethical norms, and a lack of discipline still exist, unfortunately. These issues hamper the process of effective knowledge implementation.⁵⁷

5. Discussion

Japan has been providing HRD support to Bangladesh in a number of important areas. These include training programmes for government officials, several prestigious scholarship programmes for scholars pursuing higher education in Japan, technical training initiatives for young Bangladeshi citizens, training programmes for

⁵³ KII, No. 16, September 2024; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 6, June 2023

⁵⁴ KII, No. 11, August 2024; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 4, June 2023

⁵⁵ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 2, May 2023

⁵⁶ KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 12, August 2024

⁵⁷ KII, No. 14, September 2024; KII (Key Informant Interview), No. 7, June 2023

IT experts, and so on. Each year, the number of people obtaining these opportunities is increasing in Bangladesh, and Japan is also showing great interest in Bangladeshi working people for several reasons. At present, Japan and Bangladesh are enjoying the peak of their mutual relationship as strategic partners. Due to Japan's demographic crisis, there is a massive demand for working-age people, most importantly blue-collar workers. To fill up this demand, Japan now sees Bangladesh as a potential supply-side destination for skilled workers. Aside from this, Japan also wants to develop the domestic human resources of Bangladesh, as Japan considers this country a trusted and ideological partner. Therefore, Japan is extending its hand to Bangladesh through efforts dedicated to strong mutual cooperation. Among government officials who are going to Japan on various programmes, around 20% go for higher education (master's or PhD) under the JDS Programme, and almost 80% go there on several short-term training programmes. These are organised mainly by JICA and the government of Bangladesh.⁵⁸

As for the general Bangladeshi citizens opting for technical training, BITAC (Bangladesh Industrial and Technical Assistance Centre) and JICA have been working hand-in-hand to prepare them as skilled labour forces. Many TTCs are providing vocational training services to these people.⁵⁹ At present, there are many private organisations in Bangladesh as well that are providing language training and some necessary skill development courses. After that, they're sending the trainees to Japan as skilled and semi-skilled labourers. Moreover, the B-JET Programme (Bangladesh-Japan ICT Engineers' Training Programme) provides exclusive ICT-based training to prospective Bangladeshi IT engineers.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Japan is now offering permanent residency facilities, relaxed visa policies, and a wide range of job opportunities to foreigners. This is a great opportunity for any developing nation, and Bangladesh can and should effectively utilise this opportunity by equipping its young citizens with proper language skills, communication skills, and other practical skill sets that are necessary for the industry. Several joint mega initiatives, such as the MIDI (Moheshkhali-Matarbari Integrated Development Initiative) and BIG-B (The Bay of Bengal Industrial Growth Belt), will connect Bangladesh with the global

⁵⁸ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Acceptance of technical training participants: The Knowledge Co-Creation Program (KCCP)*, n.d., https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/english/our_work/types_of_assistance/tech/acceptance/training/index.html

⁵⁹ 'Next 5Yrs' Relationship with Bangladesh Crucial: JICA', *The Daily Star*, 21 September, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-japan-relations-jica-sees-next-5-yrs-1803154>

⁶⁰ 'Japanese IT Companies Urged to Explore Business Opportunities in Bangladesh', *The Financial Express*, 2022, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/japanese-it-companies-urged-to-explore-business-opportunities-in-bangladesh-1655209757>

supply chain, thus creating a lot of employment and investment opportunities.⁶¹ Also, the SEZ (Special Economic Zone) in Araihaazar will work as a hub for Japanese companies to establish and expand their businesses in this region, ensuring more job opportunities and human capital development for Bangladeshi citizens.⁶²

5.1 Present Scenario of Japan's HRD Initiatives in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is now considered an emerging power in the region. Many major companies from abroad are now considering Bangladesh as the next big business hub in Asia, and they are already investing huge chunks of money and setting up manufacturing facilities in the country. Also, several megaprojects are being realised at the moment, and to fuel these megaprojects, a large pool of skilled workers is in demand. Japanese HRD initiatives have been performing decisive roles in this regard. Till now, these efforts have been welcomed warmly by both the government and the people in general of Bangladesh. At present, several HRD initiatives performed by Japan are effective in Bangladesh, and through these efforts, Bangladesh is moving forward to becoming a developed nation. In terms of human resource development, Japan prioritises some key areas, such as higher education, vocational training, language training, ICT training, etc. Japan believes that consistent progress in these areas will bring about sustainable progress in the long run. At present, Japan is actively engaged in several HRD-based programmes in Bangladesh, which are contributing to this developing country's overall progress to a great extent. Japan is effectively assisting Bangladesh in building a strong and sustainable workforce with the necessary skill sets.

5.2 Key Japanese Initiatives for Bangladesh's Human Resource Development

Japan conducts a wide range of HRD programmes in Bangladesh, which encompass many areas. However, for an easier understanding, Japanese HRD initiatives in Bangladesh can broadly be dissected into four categories, which are as follows:

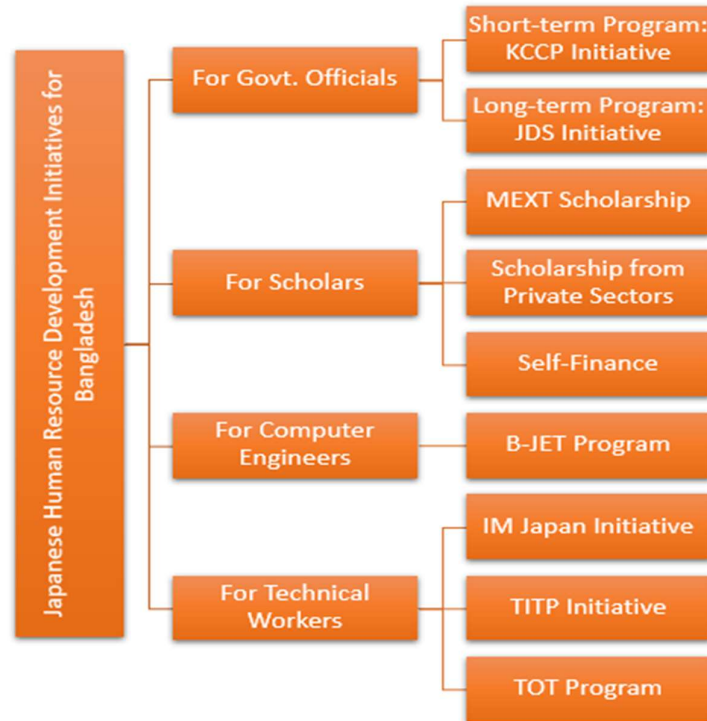
- a. Study programmes and educational exchange programmes for scholars
- b. Training programmes and higher education programmes for government officials
- c. IT training programmes with job placement opportunities
- d. Technical training initiatives

⁶¹ 'The Japan-Bangladesh Partnership for Development', *The Japan Times*, 27 May, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/05/27/commentary/japan-commentary/japan-bangladesh-partnership-development/>

⁶² Japan External Trade Organization, *How BEZA is poised to facilitate synergy between Bangladesh and Japan in industrial development*, n.d., https://www.jetro.go.jp/ext_images/world/asia/bd/seminar_reports/20160413/k2.pdf

Each of these categories is comprised of several HRD programmes targeted toward people from distinct professions. From all retrospectives, these initiatives have been performing a decisive role in shaping Bangladesh's future.

Figure 4: Japanese Human Resource Development Initiatives for Bangladesh



Source: Created by the authors

5.3 Japan's Initiatives Concerning Higher Education of Bangladeshi Scholars

Japan aims strongly at the development of higher education in Bangladesh, and for this reason, Japan offers a wide range of scholarship opportunities to Bangladeshi scholars. In fact, these scholarship programmes are among the most successful and effective HRD initiatives of Japan in Bangladesh. Japan offers Bangladeshi students and scholars several generous scholarships, such as MEXT (Monbukagakusho), JASSO (Japan Student Services Organisation) scholarships, several exchange programmes, and so on. Most of these programmes are fully funded and facilitate a wide range of students, starting from undergraduate level to doctoral and postdoctoral levels. Back in the day, only a small number of Bangladeshi students were able to

pursue higher education in Japan through such scholarship programmes. However, this trend has changed markedly in recent years, with approximately 200 students now going to Japan each year under various scholarship programmes.⁶³ The steady rise in the number of Bangladeshi recipients of Japanese scholarships reflects a positive trajectory, suggesting the likelihood of even greater access to such opportunities in the foreseeable future.

Table 2: Total Number of International Students in Japanese Higher Education Institutes*

Country/region	Number of students	% of total	Country/region	Number of students	% of total
China	94,635 (87,789)	41.2% (46.6)	India	1,445 (1,255)	0.6% (0.7)
Nepal	37,203 (14,437)	16.2% (7.7)	Germany	1,056 (1,122)	0.5% (0.6)
Viet Nam	22,633 (22,353)	9.9% (11.9)	Russian Federation	874 (803)	0.4% (0.4)
Republic of Korea	13,566 (13,919)	5.9% (7.4)	Pakistan	796 (526)	0.3% (0.3)
Myanmar	6,996 (3,600)	3.0% (1.9)	United Kingdom	769 (921)	0.3% (0.5)
Sri Lanka	5,860 (2,532)	2.6% (1.3)	Brazil	610 (595)	0.3% (0.3)
Taiwan	5,839 (5,475)	2.5% (2.9)	Cambodia	560 (535)	0.2% (0.3)
Indonesia	5,397 (4,892)	2.4% (2.6)	Italy	548 (566)	0.2% (0.3)
Bangladesh	5,157 (2,907)	2.2% (1.5)	Canada	482 (493)	0.2% (0.3)
United States of America	3,032 (3,299)	1.3% (1.7)	Singapore	398 (351)	0.2% (0.2)
Thailand	2,779 (2,788)	1.2% (1.5)	Australia	383 (458)	0.2% (0.2)
Malaysia	2,451 (2,288)	1.1% (1.2)	Mexico	382 (364)	0.2% (0.2)
Mongolia	2,323 (1,922)	1.0% (1.0)	Spain	317 (381)	0.1% (0.2)
Uzbekistan	1,652 (1,021)	0.7% (0.5)	Egypt	307 (314)	0.1% (0.2)
France	1,627 (1,619)	0.7% (0.9)	Other countries	7,833 (7,718)	3.4% (4.1)
Philippines	1,557 (1,312)	0.7% (0.7)	Total	229,467 (188,555)	100.0% (100.0)

() indicates figures as of May 1, 2023

Source: Retrieved from Japan Student Services Organization, 2025⁶⁴

* Here, higher education institutions are referring to graduate schools, universities (undergraduate), junior colleges, colleges of technology, professional training colleges, and university preparatory courses.

⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *The white paper on development cooperation 2021: Japan's international cooperation*, 2021, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100497686.pdf>

⁶⁴ Japan Student Services Organization, *Result of international student survey in Japan, 2024, 2025*, https://www.studyinJapan.go.jp/en/_mt/2025/04/data2024z_e.pdf

Higher education opportunities offered by Japan to Bangladesh can be outlined as follows:

a. **MEXT Scholarships:**

The MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: *Monbukagakusho*) programme is undoubtedly the most notable and most generous scholarship opportunity provided by the Japanese government.⁶⁵ This scholarship initiative covers several different programmes, which include:

1. Undergraduate programme
2. Research programme comprising master's and doctorate degrees
3. Fellowship programme
4. YLP (Young Leaders' Programme)
5. Training programme

As reported by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, approximately 4,653 Bangladeshi scholars have pursued studies in Japan through this scholarship programme between 1988 and 2024.

Table 3: MEXT Scholarship Recipients from Bangladesh (2020~2024)

Year	Number of Recipients
2020	120
2021	140
2022	163
2023	164
2024	136

Source: Compiled from data provided by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, 2025⁶⁶

Table 4: Cumulative Number of MEXT Scholarship Recipients from Bangladesh (1955~2018)

Course	Period	No. of Grantees
Research Students (Master's and PhD)	1955-2018	3753
Young Leaders' Programme	2008-2018	23
Asian Youth Fellowship	1997-2011	33
Teacher Training Programme	2004-2018	11
Undergraduate Programme	1988-2018	51
College of Technology	1988-2018	97
Special/Professional Training Course students	1998-2011	23
Total		3991

Source: Compiled from data provided by the Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, 2021⁶⁷

⁶⁵ M. Hasan, 'Scholarship in Japan for Bangladeshi Students: Requirements and Opportunities', *Best In Bangla*, 25 May, 2023, <https://rb.gy/3gke18>

⁶⁶ Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, 2025.

b. JASSO Scholarships:

Almost similar to the MEXT programme, the JASSO scholarship programme offers higher education opportunities to foreign students with the required qualifications. This scholarship programme facilitates a broad range of students, comprising undergraduates, graduates, language students, academic professionals, and so on.⁶⁸ Every year, a good number of students go to Japan under this scholarship programme.

c. ADB-JSP Programme:

This scholarship programme is jointly funded by the ADB (Asian Development Bank) and the government of Japan. This programme facilitates a large number of foreign students every year by providing them with fully funded scholarship opportunities. This programme is basically aimed at those talented students and professionals who haven't been able to complete their master's degree due to any sort of difficulties. Along with all the other requirements, previous job experience of the candidates is required in this programme.

d. Private Scholarships:

Besides government scholarships, several private organisations in Japan also provide scholarship opportunities to foreign students. Big business groups, such as the Toyota Foundation and the Toshiba Foundation, provide generous scholarship grants to talented foreign students. Some of these scholarships are fully funded, while others are partially funded.

e. Exchange Programmes:

Several Japanese universities offer lucrative exchange programmes to foreign students. These exchange programmes can be both short-term and long-term programmes. Such programmes add great value to the participants' knowledge of Japanese culture, norms and ethics, society, and so on.

f. JENESYS Programme:

The JENESYS programme is a short-term programme, and it is exclusive for Japan and the Asia-Pacific only. The purpose of this programme is to draw the attention of young scholars to Japan and its aesthetic culture and also to create a bridge between Japan and its friendly nations through education and policy exchange.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, *Statistical information on Bangladeshi students*, 2021, https://www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/statisticalinfo.html

⁶⁸ Japan Student Services Organization, *Scholarships for study in Japan*, n.d., https://www.jasso.go.jp/en/ryugaku/scholarship_j/index.html

⁶⁹ Japan-ASEAN Cooperation, *JENESYS program*, 2023, <https://rb.gy/fjmpci>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *People-to-people exchange: Japan friendship ties programs 'JENESYS' (Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths)*, 31 March, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page24e_000354.html

5.4 Japan's Initiatives Concerning GoB Officials

Japan puts a great deal of effort toward preparing Bangladeshi government officials as per global standards. Capacity enhancement programmes of Bangladeshi government officials have been the major and most successful initiative of Japan concerning Bangladesh's human resource development. These training programmes help fill up the knowledge gaps and prepare the participants as competent officials, especially the BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service) cadres.⁷⁰ Through JICA, Japan operates several HRD programmes for Bangladeshi government officials, and after completing these training programmes, these officials contribute to Bangladesh's government bodies to a great extent. These Japanese initiatives can broadly be dissected into two categories:

- (a) Short-term programmes, and
- (b) Long-term programmes

The short-term training programmes are usually 7 days to 1 month long. The KCCP (Knowledge Co-Creation Programme) initiative is one of the most successful among these short-term programmes. This programme requires the officials to go to Japan and go through intensive training within a limited timeframe. Through this programme, the participants get to learn the Japanese way of doing things, Japanese culture, and values, as well as other countries' values and norms.⁷¹ This training programme is a subject-based training initiative. A long list of modules is usually offered from the Japanese side, and the government of Bangladesh chooses its preferred training modules for its officials. Besides this, there are country-specific training programmes carried out by the Japanese side as well. Long-term programmes usually comprise the master's programmes offered by the Japanese government. The JDS programme (the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship), offered only to government officials, plays a substantial role in developing the human resource sector of Bangladesh. In this JDS programme, the Japanese government selectively offers subjects that are highly necessary in Bangladesh's context. Since 2002, more than 500 Bangladeshi government officials have taken part in this programme in Japan, and they have been implementing their attained knowledge in the country in various fields.⁷²

⁷⁰ 'Japan Inks Deal with Government to Provide HRD Scholarship', *New Age Bangladesh*, 27 October, 2022, <https://www.newagebd.net/article/184783/japan-inks-deal-with-govt-to-provide-hrd-scholarship>

⁷¹ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Acceptance of technical training participants: The Knowledge Co-Creation Program (KCCP)*, n.d., https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/english/our_work/types_of_assistance/tech/acceptance/training/index.html

⁷² Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.

Table 5: Distribution of JDS Scholarship Recipients by Country (2001-2019)

Country	Number of JDS Recipients
Vietnam	639
Myanmar	557
Cambodia	444
China	430
Laos	420
Bangladesh	394
Philippines	361
Mongolia	346
Uzbekistan	345
Kyrgyzstan	210
Sri Lanka	154
Indonesia	120
Nepal	80
Ghana	65
Tajikistan	62
Pakistan	17
Bhutan	10
East Timor	8
Total	4662

Source: Data compiled from JICA survey findings⁷³

5.5 Japan's Initiatives Concerning Bangladeshi Engineers and IT Experts

Japan has been exhibiting great efforts in developing Bangladesh's IT sector as per global standards. Bangladesh has a massive working-age population, and at present, there are so many young and talented people who possess sound knowledge of computer science and IT-related work. Japan seeks to properly utilise this population segment and prepare these young people as valuable human resources.⁷⁴ In this regard, the B-JET Programme is contributing to a great extent. Under the B-JET Programme (Bangladesh Japan ICT Engineers' Training Programme), many Bangladeshi computer engineers are taking part in the exclusive training programmes in Japan and then securing lucrative job positions abroad.⁷⁵ They have to attend ITEE (IT Engineer Examination) exams in Japan, which are arranged by JICA, to prove

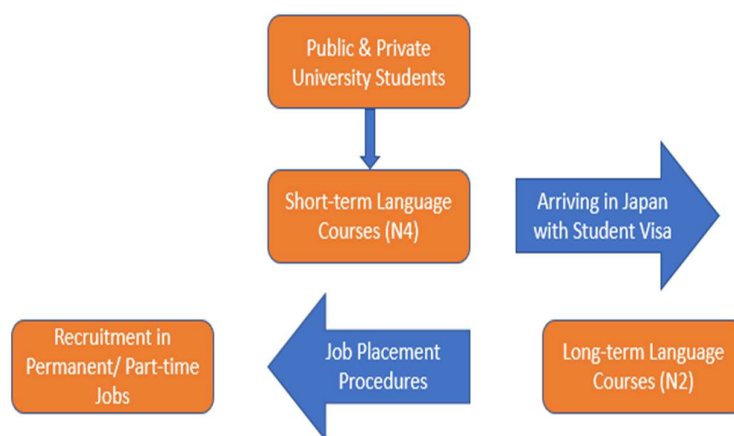
⁷³ Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.

⁷⁴ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Bangladeshi IT engineers in regional Japan: International cooperation that fills needs in both countries*, 22 February, 2023, https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/english/news/field/2022/20230222_11.html

⁷⁵ 'Further Boost in Bangladesh-Japan ICT Training Program', *Bangladesh Post*, 2 March, 2021, <https://www.bangladeshpost.net/posts/further-boost-in-bangladesh-japan-ict-training-program-55003>

their merit. In 2021, an MOU was signed between respective authorities to further strengthen this initiative.⁷⁶ Since then, a total of 265 individuals have successfully completed the B-JET training programme. Among them, more than 200 have secured employment opportunities across various regions in Japan. Additionally, 60 trainees with ties to Japan have been employed within Bangladesh's ICT sector. These outcomes collectively reflect an impressive job placement rate of 98%.⁷⁷

Figure 5: Procedures for Bangladeshi IT Professionals Recruitment in Japanese Companies



Source: Created by the authors

5.6 Japan's Initiatives Concerning Bangladeshi Professionals and Technical Trainees

Apart from all the other initiatives, Japan also arranges mutual cooperation programmes between the Bangladeshi polytechnic institutes and the technical colleges of Japan ('Kosen'). The TOT Programme (Training of Trainers) enables the trainers and teachers at the polytechnic institutes to further sharpen their knowledge base and teaching methods. Moreover, in terms of these TVET projects, Japan actually proceeds with its initiatives in accordance with the Bangladeshi government's requests. The polytechnic institutes of Bangladesh and the technical

⁷⁶ Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Bangladesh IT engineer training program for B-JET Japan market*, 2021, <https://www.jica.go.jp/bangladesh/bangland/b-jet.html>

⁷⁷ BD-ITEC, *Press release*, 2021, <https://rb.gy/noljs5>

colleges of Japan ('Kosen') are practically similar institutions, and these institutions do have mutual cooperation on vocational and technical training programmes. The TITP (Technical Intern Training Programme) is also contributing to the development of young human resources in the country.⁷⁸ As Bangladesh is an emerging developing state and it needs a lot of skilled technicians and mid-level skilled workers, such initiatives have been a blessing for the country's human resource development goals.⁷⁹ In recent years, there's been a huge demand for caregivers in Japan, as the percentage of the elderly population has been on the rise significantly. Being a highly populated country, Bangladesh can utilise this opportunity by sending trained caregivers to Japan. At present, Japan is also showing great interest in this regard, and their relaxed visa policies can be a boon for Bangladeshi workers. Both male and female caregivers are in high demand in Japan, and the job requirements aren't that difficult for properly trained caregivers and health specialists. The governments from both countries have been discussing the matter, showing great interest, and possible progress is expected to come to light very soon. Moreover, very recently, Japan introduced its prestigious JET Programme (the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme) for Bangladeshi citizens for the very first time. For those who have a very good command of English along with previous English teaching experience, this can be a great opportunity for having a wonderful career in the Japanese education sector. Initially, Japan is offering only the ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) positions to Bangladeshi educators.⁸⁰ However, in the coming days, there's a good possibility that other job positions under this JET programme will be available for Bangladeshi academic professionals as well.

6. Concluding Statement and Policy Recommendations

Bangladesh has long been on the receiving end of Japan's HRD programmes, and the country has benefitted a lot from these initiatives. Since the country's inception, a large number of Bangladeshi government officials have been receiving exclusive training opportunities in Japan every year. Moreover, a large number of scholars and students pursuing higher degrees also go to Japan every year through several scholarship programmes, such as the MEXT Programme, the ADB-JSP Scholarship, the JASSO Scholarship, and so on. As for computer engineers and IT professionals, the B-JET Programme is a golden opportunity for attaining world-class training

⁷⁸ IM Japan, *IM Japan's technical intern training program: Agreements with governments of sending countries*, n.d., <https://imm.or.jp/en/program/gov.html>

⁷⁹ World Bank, *Bangladesh brief: Safe migration for Bangladeshi workers*, 2022, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/9d8c9473e92defce23438bcf3d6a45d6-0060052022/original/BangladeshBrief-Safe-Migration-for-Bangladeshi-Workers.pdf>

⁸⁰ Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh, *Call for application: The 2023 Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program*, 2023, https://www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00670.html

opportunities and permanent job placement facilities in Japan. Also, many Bangladeshi citizens are going to work in the technical sectors and blue-collar job market in Japan through the technical training programmes, such as the IM Japan initiative, the TITP (Technical Intern Training Programme) initiative, the SSW (Specified Skilled Workers) initiative, and the TOT (Training of Trainers) programme.⁸¹ These initiatives are contributing immensely to the overall human resource development of Bangladesh. However, these initiatives are often faced with a number of challenges in Bangladesh. Major cultural differences between the two nations, the brain drain scenario in Bangladesh, gaps in policymaking areas, outdated education curriculum, etc., are some of the major obstacles here. It is expected that these shortcomings can be overcome by maintaining continuous efforts toward making those initiatives successful, especially from the Bangladeshi side. Japan and Bangladesh now share a strategic partnership, which is a major shift from the comprehensive partnership that these two nations used to maintain up until now.⁸² This is a golden opportunity for Bangladesh to make the best use of Japan's expertise in the HRD sector and to properly utilise Japan's HRD initiatives in the country. Proper policy measures and effective planning can be the keys to sustaining the effectiveness of HRD projects and initiatives in the long run. Taking this into account, this study proposes the following policy recommendations:

- a. Due to the lack of adequate facilities, most of the Bangladeshi youths are not showing interest in joining the TTCs or TVET programmes. Therefore, facilities should be increased, and more engagement should be ensured.
- b. Proper implementation of the initiatives is a must. As for the training programmes, a thorough assessment of the participants is highly necessary after the successful completion of such programmes.
- c. To ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, Bangladeshi stakeholders need to bring about a substantial change in their work culture and mindset. Emphasis should be given to adopting a systematic approach, time management, high ethical standards, and so on.
- d. Bangladesh, as a recipient country, needs to establish a well-integrated platform where all the knowledge attained in such programmes will be accumulated. A well-organised website, permanent training venues, etc., can be established to further enhance the process of knowledge exchange.
- e. Arranging joint seminars, symposiums, and relevant programmes more frequently can be vital for increasing people-to-people communication on both sides.

⁸¹ S. Noman and A. Billah, 'The golden jubilee of bilateral relations: Japanese contribution in achieving development goals in Bangladesh', *BISS Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2023, pp. 65-85. <https://www.doi.org/10.56888/BISSj2022v44n1a4>

⁸² S. Chowdhury, 'A New Turning Point in Bangladesh-Japan Ties?', *The Daily Star*, 19 April, 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/new-turning-point-bangladesh-japan-ties-3300876>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan-Bangladesh joint statement on strategic partnership*, 26 April, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100496992.pdf>

- f. As Japan is now relaxing its visa policies to attract foreign labour, Bangladesh needs to formulate and execute effective plans for exporting skilled human resources to Japan as permanent workers.
- g. Establishing the industry-academia connection and introducing an industry-orientated education system is highly necessary for Bangladesh.
- h. A real sense of democracy should be upheld by all the political parties in Bangladesh so that political stability is ensured and national interests are maintained.
- i. Instead of producing an excess workforce at the administrative level, Bangladesh needs to focus on producing more corporate executives, entrepreneurs, and technical experts.
- j. In terms of migrating labour resources to Japan, all sorts of middlemanship and fraudulent activities should be strongly dealt with by the Bangladeshi government.

Annex 1
List of Interviewees

No.	Coded Name	Organisation	Designation	Interview Date
1	Interviewee 1	Department of Japanese Studies, Dhaka University	Assistant Professor	29-05-2023
2	Interviewee 2	JETRO Dhaka	Senior Director	31-05-2023
3	Interviewee 3	JETRO Dhaka	Assistant Manager	31-05-2023
4	Interviewee 4	JICA Bangladesh Office	Programme Officer	04-06-2023
5	Interviewee 5	Retired Secretary to the Govt. of Bangladesh; Former Chairman of NBR	-	24-06-2023
6	Interviewee 6	NewVision Solutions Ltd.	Chairman	25-06-2023
7	Interviewee 7	BAAS, JUAAB, JBCCI, BIA	Founding member	27-06-2023
8	Interviewee 8	TMSS	Executive Consultant	29-10-2023
9	Interviewee 9	TMSS	Sector Head (ICT and Environment)	29-10-2023
10	Interviewee 10	Kokorozashi and Kazuko-Bhuiyan Japanese Cultural Centre	Managing Director	29-08-2024
11	Interviewee 11	Kokorozashi and Kazuko-Bhuiyan Japanese Cultural Centre	Principal	29-08-2024
12	Interviewee 12	NewVision Solutions Ltd.	Managing Director	30-08-2024
13	Interviewee 13	Kaicom Solutions	Founder and CEO	31-08-2024
14	Interviewee 14	JETRO Dhaka	Country Representative, Bangladesh	01-09-2024
15	Interviewee 15	Embassy of Japan in Bangladesh	PR and Cultural Specialist	01-09-2024
16	Interviewee 16	JICA Bangladesh Office	Chief Representative	04-09-2024