

National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB): Governance Challenges of Manuscript Development and Publication Management and Way Forward

Executive Summary

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1.1 Background and Rationale

The National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) has been playing an important role in developing and printing the textbooks for pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher-secondary and madrasa education in Bangladesh. The NCTB has been involved in curriculum development, syllabus reform, verification and evaluation of the textbook's effectiveness, developing manuscripts of textbooks, and distribution of free books and other learning related materials among students. In the academic year of 2017, the NCTB distributed 362 million 182 thousand 245 free books among 42 million 635 thousand 929 students, which cost around Tk 10.91 billion. The NCTB has printed and distributed around 254 million 301 thousand 128 books till date.

The NCTB is facing controversy for different activities in recent years. The institution is now the talk of the town in mass media due to errors in textbooks, low quality books and satisfying a vested interest groups. There is a dearth of research on how these mistakes are occurring in the first place, who is involved in the process and what initiative the government is taking to mitigate the mishaps. Education is one of the five sectors that Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) is focusing on to establish good governance and prudently explore ways to overcome the challenges. Under this context, this research has been conducted to find out the reasons behind the lack of good governance in the development and publication of manuscripts by the NCTB.

1.2 Purpose of the research

The objective of the research is to identify the challenges of good governance in the development of manuscripts and publication by the NCTB, and to provide recommendations to overcome the challenges. The specific objectives of this research are to:

1. Review the legal and organizational structure of the NCTB with regard to the development of manuscripts and textbook printing;
2. Review the process of manuscript development and publication of textbooks;
3. Identify the irregularities and corruption in the process of manuscript development and publication of textbooks; and
4. Give recommendations for addressing the challenges identified in manuscript development and publication of textbooks.

1.3 Research Method and Timeline

This is a qualitative research where key informant interviews have been used as the method of data collection. Interviews of the staff of the NCTB, senior officials of the Ministries of Education and Primary and Mass Education, officials of the departments of primary and secondary and higher education, members of the manuscript development committee, manuscript writers and editors, researchers and academics, supervising organisations, printers, head teachers of primary and secondary schools, representatives of donor agencies and journalists were conducted. Besides, the relevant laws and regulations related to manuscript development and publication management, various publications, annual reports of NCTB and reports published in newspapers and other media have been reviewed. After completion of the research, two sharing meetings with the NCTB high officials were organised, and the report has been updated on the basis of their feedback. Data collection, analysis and report writing have been done during October 2016 to October 2017.

2. Review of the Legal Framework concerning Manuscript Development and Printing

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board Ordinance 1983 was adopted in order to conduct activities related to the curriculum and textbooks. In January 2010, the ordinance was amended as the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (Amendment) Act 2010. This act stipulates (1) the formation of national curriculum and textbook board (recruitment of Chairperson and members, process of forming board); (2) activities of the NCTB; and (3) rules for forming various committees (number of members, and educational qualifications).

The limitations may be identified as follows:

1. There is a dearth of policy guidelines on the development of the curriculum and manuscripts.
2. There is a shortage of textbook printing guidelines.
3. So far, no rules have been adopted under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board Ordinance 1983, as a result of which the NCTB activities are conducted based on executive orders.
4. There is no reference of the National Curriculum Coordination Committee (NCCC) and the Curriculum Committee under the current law. These committees are formed by executive orders from the relevant ministry.
5. The validity of textbook and syllabus committee members are not mentioned. The old committee can keep on working until a new committee is formed.
6. The NCTB is under the risk of arbitrary control by the education ministry on various provisions of this act.

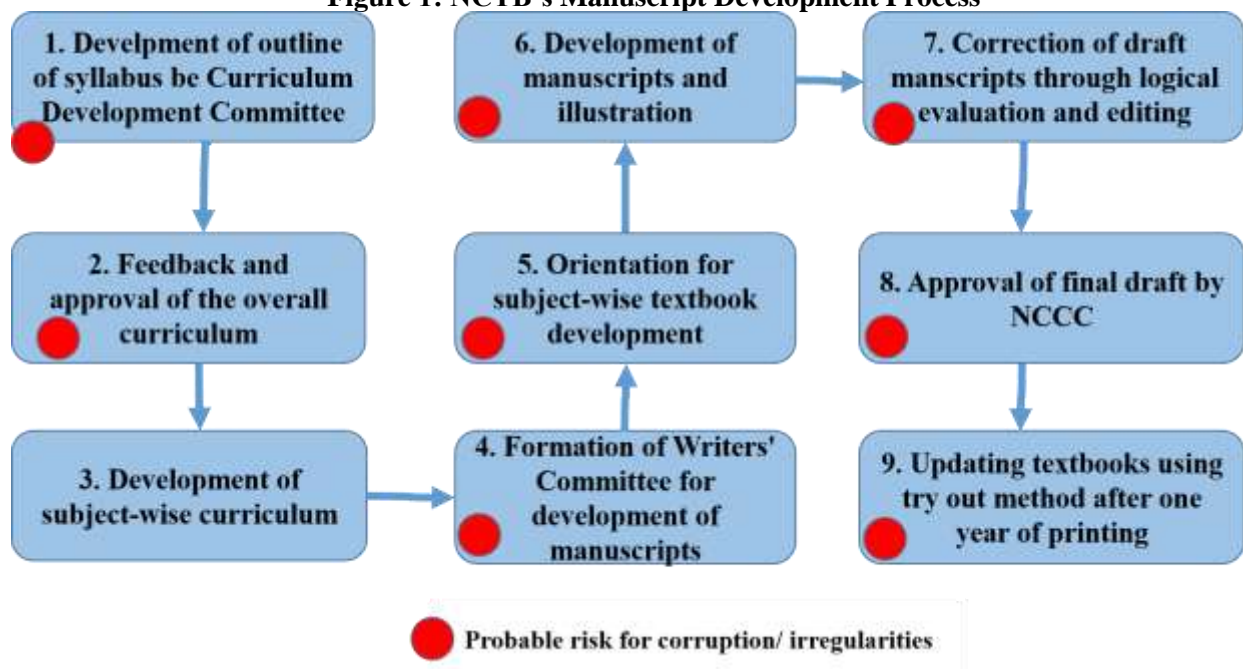
3. NCTB's organizational structure and activities

The NCTB is an autonomous organization. The Board comprises a Chairperson and four Members appointed by the government and the activities are undertaken according to the terms set by the government. The Member (Secondary) looks after the activities of secondary and higher secondary curriculum and provides necessary guidelines, the Member (Primary) supervises pre-primary and primary level curriculum, the Member (Textbooks) is responsible for production, editing and distribution of textbooks, procurement of papers, and Member (Finance) is responsible for all financial issues. The Secretary is appointed by the government who provides overall support for the performance of the administrative functions of the board, including the Chairperson and the Members.

4. NCTB's Manuscript Development Process

Development of the manuscripts begins with the curriculum development by the specified committee. After receiving feedback on the curriculum, the outline and subject-wise curriculums are approved. Then the writers' committee is formed with one or more editors assigned for each writer group, and orientation training of subject-wise textbooks is provided. After development of each book, the write ups are selected in appropriate cases, and edited by proofreaders. Later, logical evaluation and editing are done for every book. The final manuscript is then approved by the Board and the NCCC. One year after printing, feedback is collected on the textbooks through try-out method, and are revised based on the feedback.

Figure 1: NCTB's Manuscript Development Process

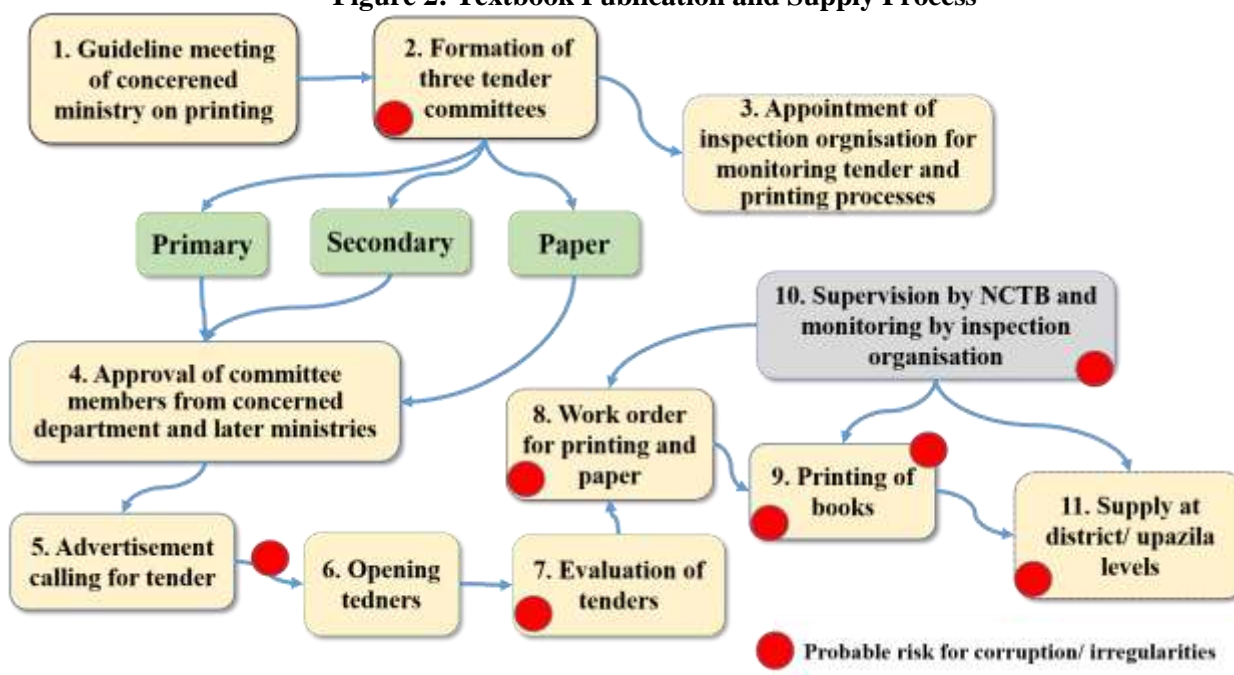


5. Challenges of Good Governance in Manuscript Development

- 5.1 Formation of various committees:** Different committees (such as the NCCC, Technical Committee, Vetting Committee, Curriculum Development Committee, Writers Committee) are formed following the recommendations of the NCTB by the government through the Ministry. It is alleged that political considerations play a crucial role in selection of the membership in these committees as it is under the purview of the government. It is also alleged that members are either included or discarded from the committees despite having competence.
- 5.2 Organising of different workshops:** The NCTB organises different workshops for developing the curriculum, subject-wise curriculums, and level-wise textbooks with participation from experienced academics, education researchers, teachers from school, college and universities. It is alleged that the participants are selected through personal bias and nepotism. The opinions of the participants are not considered seriously. Every team is supposed to have 40 trainees which is not always the case. There are also allegations that the trainees are not informed of the training times and not given adequate time slots.
- 5.3 Selection of writers:** Writers' Committees comprising of five to seven members are formed with national experts, experienced class teachers and syllabus experts of NCTB following the law. However, there are allegations of selecting unqualified members on the basis of nepotism and recommendations from the ministry. As a result all members do not have proper conception of the subject matter, all do not have the equal contribution and all members do not have adequate understanding capacity. Moreover, some writers are included in the team whose contribution are not known to other team members.
- 5.4 Selection of write ups:** The tendency of using particular terms in textbooks reflecting the ruling party's creed is observed. During the tenure of the previous alliance, the word 'Bangalee' was not used, rather 'people of this country' was used. Moreover, the goat raising programme was particularly highlighted in textbooks during that period. Recently a religious fundamentalist group demanded to replace "Hindu, Christian or foreign names" with "beautiful Islamic names", discard any kind of dialogues between girls and boys from madrasa books, and discard 11 "non-Islamic" poems from four textbooks of primary and secondary levels, different Hindu names and stories, and the use of 'period' from the physical development chapter for girls. It is observed that 16 write ups have been discarded from five primary and secondary level books of which 11 are included in the demands of that religious group. Moreover, all the Hindu, Christian or foreign names have been replaced with Islamic names, and all kinds of dialogues between girls and boys have been discarded. The name of the NCTB Chairman, who is a Hindu by religion, has been omitted in the madrasa textbooks.
- 5.5 Appointment of subject specialists:** In many stances subject related specialists are not appointed, and expert of one subject is given responsibility of another subject. Officials on deputation are appointed as subject specialists despite not having adequate competency. For instance, a teacher of Economics is given responsibilities of Bangla, and a teacher of Zoology is given the responsibilities of Christian and Ethical Education. Even accounts and store officials are given charge of different books. In many stances teachers influence the administration to be posted at NCTB with an aim only to stay in Dhaka. There are experts more than the necessity, for instance NCTB has seven specialists for philosophy out of a total of 64 experts although there is no curriculum in philosophy at the primary or secondary level.
- 5.6 Writer-editor coordination:** The editor(s) edits the manuscript after submission at NCTB's editing section after writing, modification and enrichment. However, it is alleged that there is lack of coordination between the writers and editors in the process in the name of lack of time.

- 5.7 Editing:** There are allegations that the editors are not doing their job properly. They are more involved in personal matters, share business on internet, or personal NGO activities and printing business. As a result there are hundreds of errors in different books of primary and secondary levels. In the 2016, 58 errors in the sixth grade Islam and Ethical Education books were corrected, but 20 new errors are there again in 2017.
- 5.8 Appointing proofreaders:** There are several complaints for appointing proofreaders through lobbying and nepotism. It is alleged that a section of officials from the ministry and the NCTB are involved in such irregularity.
- 5.9 Using try out method:** One of the functions of the NCTB is to collect feedback from the field level on the textbook one year after publication, which is known as the try out method. There are allegations that they do not follow this process properly, and changes are not done in the textbooks on the basis of the feedback.
- 5.10 Preserving manuscripts:** The NCTB does not have any kind of rule or initiative to preserve the manuscripts. The editor's section is supposed to do this task but it does not happen due to a lack of initiatives.
- 5.11 Changing write ups:** Write ups are changed not following the curriculum. Such changes are made without the knowledge of the writers-editors, and in some instances the editors are made to bring in such changes. In the 2013 education year, a poem written by a senior government official was included in the ninth-tenth grade Bengali textbook without following the proper procedure. As a result students got the book a few months later than the scheduled time.

Figure 2: Textbook Publication and Supply Process



6. Textbook Publication and Supply

First NCTB's printing committee decides to form and approve three separate tender committees for primary, secondary and paper procurement. The names of these committees are sent to the concerned ministries and departments for approval. In case of the committee for the primary level, the names of committee members is sent to the World Bank for approval. Afterwards, the NCTB completes all tender related activities such as publication of advertisement, formation of tender open committee, evaluation

committee and so on. On the other hand, the list of names and the information of NCTB is sent to the education ministry for secondary inspection and purchase of paper. Finally all the work related to the tender is completed.

With formation of the tender committee, the NCTB appoints inspection organisations for monitoring the tender and printing processes. The Member (textbook) arranges for open tender in line with the Public Procurement Act 2006 and Public Procurement Rules 2008 to print textbooks of secondary and higher-secondary levels. The Curriculum section collects the annual demands of books from the grassroots, and calls for two types of tender – with paper and without paper. The NCTB forms a seven-member evaluation committee to evaluate the infrastructure and other documents submitted by the tenderers, and submits for final approval to the concerned ministry. The approved tenderers are given work order. The printers directly supply the printed textbooks to district and upazila level. The inspecting organisation monitors the printing and distribution of textbooks (see Figure 2).

7. Good governance deficit in printing work

7.1 Calling tender: It is alleged that the information on the estimated cost of printing are provided to some of the selected printing firms by a section of the NCTB officials, and financially benefitted out of it. Moreover, the printing firms submit tenders through forming a syndicate.

7.2 Honorarium for textbook production and distribution: A section of the NCTB staff takes an honorarium ranging from Tk 1,000 to 3,000 for regular tasks such as developing guidelines, opening tender box, preparing CS, despite the fact that there is no official order in this regard. For this Tk 2 million 760 thousand 200 for the education year 2017 and Tk 580 thousand was spent for the education year 2016. An audit objection was raised in the latest audit done by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which is still pending to be resolved.

7.3 Selection of printing organization: It is alleged that a number of NCTB official takes part in the bidding process in another name and gets work order. It is also alleged that individuals take part in the bidding process in different names and gets work orders. Influence peddling is there from higher authorities despite being rejected by technical committees. It is also alleged that false information is provided in the tender forms with regard to own printing press, binding and laminating system, cutting machine and adequate human resource to get order. Work orders are given even the above conditions are not met. Moreover, these conditions are not applied equally for all bidders.

7.4 Sub-contracting: Although the Printing Act 1973 prohibits any printing done by any firm except a printing organization, most of the organisations receiving the work order gives works on sub-contract after getting the order from NCTB. Works such as printing, binding and lamination are given as sub-contracts. It is alleged that this is taking place in exchange of bribe.

7.5 Procuring paper: The NCTB procures paper for the textbooks (65) for secondary levels, in accordance with the PPR terms. The paper is procured through open international tenders. However, it is alleged that the NCTB gives work orders to paper mills that are not approved by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) in exchange of bribe. The Certification Marks Scheme (CM) license has not been mandatory despite recommendations from BSTI. It is alleged that work orders are given despite lack of capacity of supplying papers as per specifications, and to mills that are black-listed. As a result, low quality papers are supplied. It is found that organizations blacklisted in the last 4 years have been given work orders in 2016. Allegations from printing organisations are not taken into consideration.

7.6 Quality control: There are allegations that the inspection organisation submits reports despite being absent, and submits satisfactory reports in exchange of bribe. According to many informants, printing organisations use proper papers during daytime in apprehension of supervision, but use low quality papers during nighttime, which, in most cases, are supplied to the upazila level.

7.7 Supplying textbooks: The textbooks are to be supplied in every upazila according to the schedule, however, which, some institutions fail in a number of districts. However, the inspection organisation submits report that the textbooks had been supplied within the timeline.

8. Overall Observations

It is evident in the study that there is influence and control by the Ministry of Education in the activities of the NCTB program, which is reflected from in the formation of different committees to selection of write ups for textbooks. As a result, the NCTB relies mostly on the government. The manuscript development process is opaque, not proper and influenced by partisan politics and creed. Another notable issue is that the ‘specialised’ nature of textbook development is given adequate importance, and in many instances the real experts are not involved in the process.

The NCTB is to face a great challenge of distributing a huge number of free books to the students on the first day of the year with limited technical and professional competence. The NCTB lacks experts and human resource along with technical skills. Moreover, there is lack of coordination between the ministry and NCTB and between the writers and editors. Due to gaps in inspection and supervision, there are gaps in distribution on time and quality of textbooks.

On the other hand, corruption and irregularities exist in the publication of textbooks. The NCTB is not capable of delivering at the expected level due to administrative and legal limitations. Likewise, the officials of the NCTB are involved in various corruption and irregularities as it cannot ensure proper accountability of them. Above all, the transparency and accountability in the responsibilities of the NCTB is hampered in many instances.

Figure 3: Governance Challenges, Reasons and Impacts of NCTB’s Manuscript Development and Printing at a Glance

Reason	Result	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The curriculum not publicly available ▪ Political/ ideological consideration in selection of members in different committees ▪ Insufficient honorarium and time for writers ▪ Lack of coordination between writers and editors ▪ Lack of capacity – human resource, skill ▪ Negligence in editing, inspection and supervision ▪ Gap in ensuring accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specialists of concerned subjects not appointed ▪ Irregular selection of write ups ▪ Corruption and irregularities in procuring paper, selection of printing institutions and inspection agencies ▪ Decreasing quality of textbooks (in terms of low quality papers, information and spelling errors) ▪ Delivery of textbooks not within time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalization of corruption in NCTB ▪ Decreasing quality of child education ▪ Risk of spreading communalism

9. Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to establish good governance in the development of manuscripts and publication:

Law and Policy Reform

1. The NCTB should be established as an independent commission, which will work to develop policies of preparing textbooks, compilations, and other relative tasks.
2. A committee comprising of nationally eminent experts must be formed in order to form the above Commission. This committee will recommend about this commission in 3-6 months.

3. Until the formation of the independent commission, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board Ordinance 1983 will be amended where the following should be mentioned.
 - The influence and control of the Education Ministry on the activities of NCTB must be decreased;
 - The formation duration, activities, and criteria for being members of the NCCC and the Curriculum Committee must be specified;
 - The criteria and duration of the Syllabus and Textbook Committee members must be determined;
 - Instructions and guidelines for printing textbooks must be included.
4. The Rules for the National Curriculum and Textbook Board Ordinance 1983 have to be adopted.
5. Specific policy for developing curriculum and manuscripts must be adopted.

Institutional Capacity

6. The current curriculum must be made publicly available.
7. Individuals experienced on education and curriculum must be appointed as members of the NCTB (specially for primary and secondary levels).
8. A code of conduct must be adopted for the NCTB staff following the National Integrity Strategy, and initiatives for positive and negative incentives must be undertaken.
9. Appropriate and capable people have to be deputed as subject specialists in the NCTB.
10. All investigation reports (including formulation and publication) must be published on the website.

Manuscript Development and Printing

11. Contracts with the writers and editors for every book have to be introduced, where the scope, honorarium, duration etc. will be detailed out.
12. Subject-wise specialists and writers skilled in writing textbooks for children must be appointed for developing manuscripts.
13. The honorarium of writers must be determined based on specific standards.
14. Every step of formulation and publication of manuscripts must be properly documented. The manuscripts must be preserved in digital format.
15. E-tendering must be introduced for printing textbooks.
16. The technical skills of the NCTB staff involved in supervision must be improved.