

Beyond the Lecture Hall: A Qualitative Study of University Educators' Experiences, Challenges, and Aspirations for Reimagining Pedagogical Preparation in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

University educators in Bangladesh generally begin their teaching careers without pedagogical training and instead rely on personal techniques for classroom management and course design. This study examines their efforts, obstacles, and hopes to improve their preparation for teaching. It employs a qualitative methodology, using thematic analysis of 14 in-depth interviews with public university faculty. Data saturation was reached at 14 participants. A dominant finding is the construction of a teaching role with little instructional experience and guidance, a role identity shaped by a perceived imbalance of power between teaching and research, and a quest for greater teaching support, training, and area identity. This study elucidates the role that institutional culture and professional identity play in shaping pedagogical preparation. The findings highlight the need for well-structured faculty development to improve and reform teaching systems in universities.

Keywords: pedagogical preparation, university educators, professional identity, higher education, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

Background

In Bangladeshi universities, teaching primarily relies on lectures, where professors present course material while students take notes. While this method can be effective for large class sizes, it often limits interaction between instructors and students, hinders critical thinking, and reduces student engagement. Many educators

start their teaching careers without formal training in pedagogy and develop their classroom management skills through experience. As a result, there may be inconsistencies in instructional quality, and outdated teaching practices may persist (Adams & Crasborn, 2025; Fernando, 2026). In recent decades, the number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh has increased rapidly, with new public universities established, student enrollments rising, and academic departments expanding across various disciplines (Alom et al., 2025). While this growth has enhanced access to higher education, it has placed greater demands on academic staff, who must manage larger classes, diverse student needs, and new academic programs. Ideally, faculty members should have both strong subject matter expertise and pedagogical skills; however, this balance is often lacking in practice (Klooger et al., 2026).

Research Problem

Several interconnected factors help explain the gap between what we call “ideal” and what actually happens in teaching practices in Bangladeshi higher education. In many cases, faculty are recruited primarily for disciplinary expertise, not for their ability to teach well. As a result, hiring and promotion tend to value academic credentials and research output more than teaching competence (Mannan & Maruf, 2024). This creates an environment in which scholarship becomes the primary focus, while good teaching is minimally acknowledged. Institutional backing for teaching growth is also limited. Faculty development sessions are often short-lived and irregular, and many are tied to administrative duties rather than to pedagogical skills (Enny et al., 2025). Workshops and training do exist, but they rarely continue long enough or include consistent mentoring afterward. Even orientation for new faculty, which should serve as a bridge, tends to focus on administrative procedures rather than on teaching development. Because of these gaps, instructors often handle classroom challenges on their own, with minimal collegial support. This contributes to weaker learning experiences for students and higher stress levels for faculty. Teaching, therefore, remains a secondary activity within institutional priorities. For these reasons, additional research is needed to understand educators’ lived experiences and how institutional structures, professional identity, and support mechanisms influence teaching practices across Bangladeshi higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate university educators' experiences of pedagogical preparation, the challenges they face, and the opportunities they see for further developing their teaching. In addition to emphasizing the need for teaching preparation from institutional and individual perspectives, the study seeks to identify ways to improve effective pedagogical preparation (Yao et al., 2026). The study focuses on the need to understand teaching as both a profession and a lived experience.

Research Questions

The study addresses three questions:

1. How do university educators describe their pedagogical preparation?
2. What institutional and structural challenges influence their teaching?
3. How do they envision improved pedagogical preparation systems?

The following questions frame the teaching investigation within public universities and aim to encapsulate both the lived experiences and the reflections on the teaching practice of the potential reforms.

Context of Higher Education in Bangladesh

Public universities in Bangladesh are the main component of the higher education system and operate under a centralized governance, policy, and administrative framework. In most cases, faculty recruitment and promotion are decided by academic credentials and research output, while teaching experience and teaching effectiveness count little in the career path (Mannan et al., 2025). Bigger class sizes and a more diverse student mix have made the mismatch between teaching and research duties more obvious. Even though faculty are expected to conduct research, they also have to manage heavy teaching loads, leaving little time to try new learning approaches or adopt instructional methods. Faculty development activities tend to remain

unsystematic and often take the form of short-term workshops rather than ongoing mentoring or professional training. There are also policy gaps, as national and institutional arrangements still prioritize research output over teaching development (Mannan & Mustafa, 2023). This study looks at how institutional culture, professional identity, and support structures shape teaching quality in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pedagogical Preparation in Higher Education

(Motia Mannan et al., 2025) argued that pedagogical preparation is a key part of effective teaching across multiple domains, yet in Bangladesh and a few other higher education settings, that preparation remains sketchy. When faculty start teaching, they usually bring strong subject knowledge, but many have little or no training in teaching strategies. They often also lack grounding in formative and summative assessment or curriculum development. As a result, there is an overreliance on lecturing, which reduces student engagement and critical thinking (Ramlo, 2026). This study leans on Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory of Learning as a counterpoint to the teacher-centered passive learning model. Learning is seen as active cooperative work, so knowledge transfer becomes secondary to effective teaching (Lee et al., 2026). Prior studies show that workshops mentoring teaching-focused courses boost self-view and perceived teaching effectiveness (D'Orazio et al., 2026).

Academic Development in Developing Countries

The rapid growth of the higher education system and prevailing structural limitations shape academic development in the developing world. Pedagogical preparedness is especially challenging due to diverse student needs, limited teaching aids, and large class sizes (Nadaf, 2026). In Bangladesh, as in much of South Asia, teaching staff often rely on personal experience or colleagues' observations rather than formal training. The Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) helps explain faculty motivation in these circumstances, as autonomy, competence, and relatedness remain important (Kurt & Topkaya, 2025). Educators may become demotivated to adopt new teaching approaches when practical institutional support is lacking (Gusrianto et al., 2025). Studies in India and Nigeria found that faculty advancement schemes were poorly implemented and inadequately addressed teaching problems (Ojeme & Destiny, 2021). Academic development thus depends on skills, motivation, and institutional context.

Teaching–Research Tension

Research and teaching responsibilities are often in conflict, a recurrent thread in higher education literature. The time and effort devoted to teaching decrease when faculty evaluations and promotions place greater weight on research (Doğan & Arslan, 2024).

In Bangladesh, promotional criteria that favor publications and grant procurement over instruction exacerbate tensions. Role Theory (Biddle, 1986) is the lens that best fits these situations, as it examines how people act when expectations are mismatched (Balgopal, 2024). When teaching is treated as secondary to research, faculty members spend very little time on strengthening teaching competencies (Robinson, 2022). Attempts to integrate teaching and research show modest results due to structural constraints (Asadullah et al., 2025). This shows institutional influence on preparation.

Institutional Culture and Academic Identity

(Chitera Joshua, 2025) argues that operational culture and academic identity are pivotal to the development of teaching activities. Operational culture includes policies, reward systems, workload distribution, and organizational customs. Faculty interpret these through professional identity shaped by disciplinary values, personal beliefs, and perceptions of teaching legitimacy (Espinosa & Rusek, 2026). Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000) suggests that individuals act on the basis of self-perception within social and institutional contexts. In Bangladesh, many faculty identify more as researchers than teachers, aligning with institutional norms that weaken teaching (Mannan et al., 2025). (Meekaew et al., 2026) Note that the literature often treats teaching or policy in isolation and overlooks how faculty manage issues at both the personal and professional

levels.

Research Gap

The literature contains numerous deficiencies that have been systematically verified. In Bangladesh, for example, Pedagogical Preparation professionalization is more often than not analyzed functionally, with reductions of the components involved overshadowing the impact of the culture, personal culture, and motivation. In principle, the social constructivist perspective, the self-determination perspective, the role theory, and the identity theory can be used to explain the social construction, motivation, and negotiation of teaching. In most developing countries, however, these lenses have been neglected when considering the faculty's lived experiences of pedagogical preparation. This study attempts to address this by articulating educators' experiences and the extent to which structural and personal elements are integrated into teaching.

Theoretical Framework

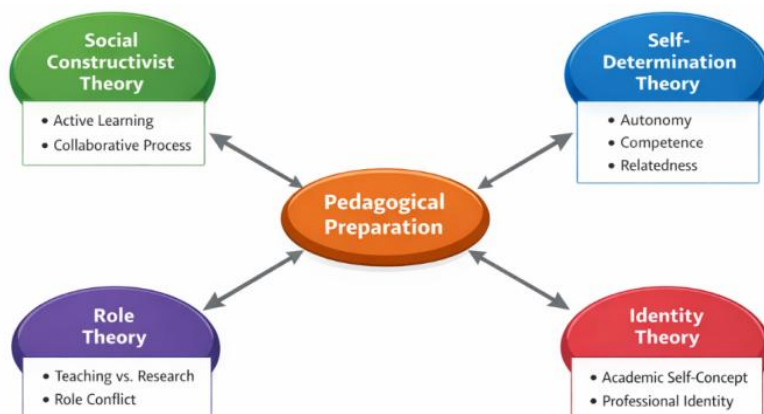


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

The foundation for this study rests on four theories. Active Collaborative Learning Theories (ACLT) rest on the premise that there are student-engaging teaching methodologies beyond the traditional lecture method (Sarangi, 2026). Faculty Motivation: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that for innovation in teaching, there should be a balance in autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bizimana, 2026). The Role Theory of Higher Education examines teaching and research expectations and the ways competing role demands affect behavior (Hudson & Hickman, 2026). Identity Theory (IT) examines educators' self-concepts and perceptions of their role in teaching, which are influenced by the institutional and disciplinary context and, in turn, impact the degree of involvement in teaching (Espinosa & Rusek, 2026). These theories inform the socially and structurally conditioned phenomenon of pedagogical preparation from multiple vantage points.

Conceptual Framework

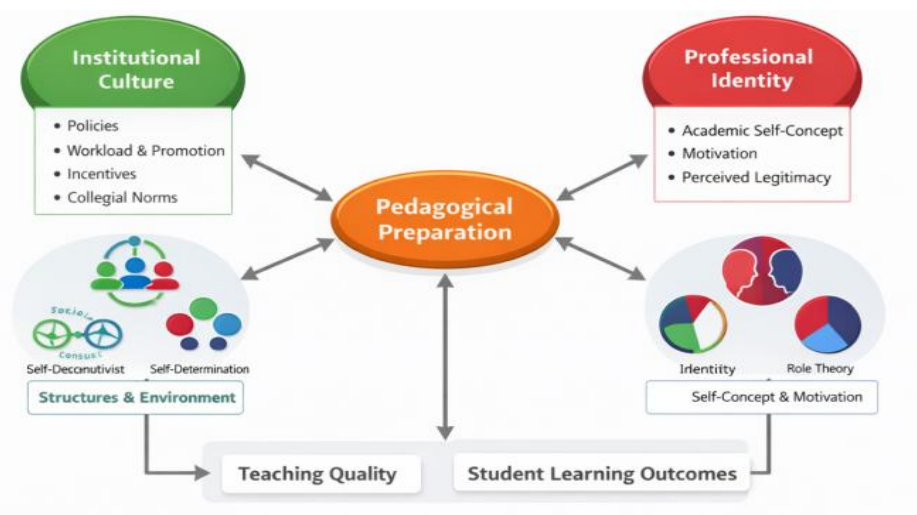


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

The center combines faculty roles as cultural and institutional (Colbert et al., 2026). Policies, promotions, and workloads shape a teaching environment. Faculty identity mediates how these structures are seen and their impact on engagement and motivation (Feng et al., 2026). The framework links faculty agency with student learning. Pedagogical preparation is shaped by organizational culture and personal identity (Huang, 2026). Overall, it emphasizes improved teaching practices and the integration of identity with structural factors, while maintaining clear boundaries to support policy adoption in Bangladeshi universities.

Institutional Culture in Universities

The culture of institutions shapes the incentive structures, workload distributions, and formal expectations. Empirical studies show that in public universities, research-based, top-down policies that emphasize authority and hierarchy limit teaching engagement (Izuakor et al., 2026). Though faculty development exists, it is often poorly aligned with teaching, short-term, and fragmented (Colbert et al., 2026). From this structural perspective, it is easy to see why teaching is a low priority for faculty, even if they believe in the need.

Professional Identity of Academics

Faculty identity affects motivation, engagement, and teaching. Identity Theory explains behavior through self-concepts shaped by social and institutional contexts (Phan & Pham, 2026). In Bangladesh, faculty identity is research-oriented, often reducing focus on teaching (Hossain, 2025). Identity dynamics explain role balance.

Integrating the Two Perspectives

The combination of professional identity and institutional culture enables pedagogical preparation to adapt to both external and internal structures and processes of negotiation (Javahery, 2024). Institutional frameworks shape possibilities and incentives, while identity drives engagement and adaptation (Adinew, 2024). In Bangladesh, faculty experience and improve teaching (Imam et al., 2025). Pedagogical preparation is a negotiated, contextual activity, not only technical skill acquisition (Meihami, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study chooses a qualitative research design to interpret university teachers' experiences, barriers, and pedagogical preparation frameworks. The interpretivist paradigm emphasizes participants' perspectives and situational, cultural, and institutional contexts. It differs from longitudinal and experimental designs that focus on time and measurable outcomes (Klenk, 2025). Unlike systematic reviews and clinical trials guided by CONSORT and PRISMA frameworks (Grech & Eldawlatly, 2024), these are not applicable here. (Holst et al., 2025) Stress the use of qualitative frameworks to ensure credibility, transparency, and replicability.

Participants

The research recruited 12–15 university educators from public universities in Bangladesh using purposive sampling to ensure they had teaching experience and were involved with undergraduate or postgraduate students. Faculty members of both sexes and from diverse academic backgrounds, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to more than 20 years, were included (Matiba, 2023). Inclusion required at least five years of teaching experience (Carcamo et al., 2025), excluding research- or administration-focused faculty without teaching duties. The final analyzed sample consisted of 14 participants, and data saturation was reached at this point.

Data Collection

Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and used semi-structured guides focusing on college culture, professional integration, and teaching preparation (Moskowitz, 2024). This design allowed flexibility, follow-up probing, and deeper exploration of lived experiences, which is appropriate for qualitative inquiry. Interviews captured participants' viewpoints, difficulties, and aims (Biferie et al., 2025) and were conducted privately with

informed consent (Afenigus & Sinshaw, 2025). The author notes provided additional NVivo data from non-verbal observations.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Naeem et al., 2023) was used to evaluate the interviews. Manual thematic analysis was conducted: (1) transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure immersion in the data; (2) line-by-line open coding was performed; (3) similar codes were grouped into broader categories and refined into coherent themes; (4) themes were cross-checked and discussed by two researchers to reduce interpretive bias and enhance analytical consistency; and (5) reflexive journaling was maintained throughout to document analytical decisions, assumptions, and potential researcher bias.

The interview data were analyzed line by line to identify key issues, contradictions, and contextual nuances. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, producing a coherent narrative on challenges in teacher education, including structural constraints within the higher education system and the construction of professional identity. Qualitative data management tools were used to organize transcripts and codes while preserving analytical depth systematically. The analysis prioritized interpretation over theory verification, focusing on extending understanding of the phenomenon within its specific context rather than testing pre-existing frameworks.

Trustworthiness

To validate the trustworthiness of this narrative, member checking (Vella, 2024), reflexive journaling, and audit trails of coding decisions, theme development, and analytical steps were used. For credibility, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails of coding decisions were used. Reflexive journaling was used during analysis to question the researcher's assumptions, positionality, and potential bias in coding and theme construction. Together, these strategies strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings and their representation of participants' lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical considerations. Participants could withdraw at any time (Dahal, 2024). Data were anonymized, and confidentiality was maintained through password-protected files. Dhaka University IRB granted ethical approval. The research adhered to the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, as well as international qualitative research standards.

FINDINGS

The analysis identified five themes that both preceded and were central to the university educators' pedagogical preparation experiences in Bangladesh. In Table 1, the themes, central meanings, and some quotations are summarized.

Table 1. Summary of Themes, Descriptions, and Illustrative Quotations

Theme	Description	Illustrative Quotation	Findings
Becoming a Teacher Without Formal Preparation	Faculty members enter university teaching without structured pedagogical training and rely on experiential learning.	"I was expected to lecture and guide students, but no one ever taught me how to design a lesson or assess understanding effectively."	This shows a systemic gap between instructional expertise and substantive knowledge. Faculty members were content experts and pedagogical novices, and that created ambiguity and instructional self-coping mechanisms.
Institutional Constraints on	Structural limitations such as large class	"Even if I wanted to introduce interactive	This reveals that institutional culture and the way structures are designed

Teaching	sizes, heavy workloads, and limited support hinder innovative teaching.	methods, managing 200 students in a lecture hall is nearly impossible.”	often limit what people can actually do in practice, thereby weakening motivation to improve teaching.
Research Prestige vs Teaching Responsibility	Institutional reward systems prioritize research output over teaching quality.	“If you focus on teaching, it does not count much in your career progression. Research publications are what matter.”	Such a structure leads to professional challenges and, in turn, stagnant professional cycles in teaching. Teaching is pushed to the periphery of the academic self, thereby strengthening a culture of academic identity that is performance-based and research-activity-focused.
Identity Tensions and Emotional Labor	Faculty experience emotional strain as they negotiate researcher and teacher identities.	“I often feel torn between my identity as a researcher and as a teacher.”	These stories show that the emotional and cognitive identity conflicts educators face are as important as the structural barriers that affect the quality of teaching.
Aspirations for Transformative Reform	Educators express a strong desire for formal training, mentorship, and policy reform.	“We need structured workshops and incentives that make good teaching visible and valued.”	This optimism demonstrates the potential for change and underscores the need for structural changes, along with a shift in professional identities, to improve teaching in higher education in Bangladesh.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that a combination of structural, cultural, and identity factors influences the pedagogical preparation of Bangladeshi universities. Table 2 shows the intersection of the empirical themes with relevant theoretical frameworks.

Table 2. Integration of Findings with Theoretical Frameworks

Empirical Theme	Theoretical Lens	Interpretive Insight
Becoming a Teacher Without Formal Preparation	Social Constructivist Theory	Teaching competence develops through experiential and social learning rather than formal training.
Institutional Constraints on Teaching	Institutional Theory	Organizational structures mediate and often restrict pedagogical agency.
Research Prestige vs Teaching Responsibility	Role Theory	Conflicting institutional expectations create role strain and motivational imbalance.
Identity Tensions and Emotional Labor	Identity Theory	Professional self-concept shapes engagement with teaching responsibilities.
Aspirations for Transformative Reform	Self-Determination Theory	Autonomy, competence, and recognition enhance motivation for pedagogical engagement.

Negotiating Identity and Motivation

The Identity theory explains how the teaching staff understands the vertical order within their institution and how research becomes instrumental to one’s professional advancement, thereby subordinating teaching to

one's academic identity. (Bizimana, 2026) examines participants' aspirations for teaching reform through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and explains that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are vital to sustaining one's teaching. Extending this literature, the current study reveals that motivational dynamics are not only individual psychological processes but are deeply embedded in institutional structures and identity negotiations in Bangladeshi public universities. It can therefore be posited that, in addition to structural aspects, when the motivational aspect is adequately addressed, preparation for teaching and learning can be improved.

Role Conflict and Professional Silos

The divide between teaching and research prestige and responsibility is consistent with the tenets of Role Theory, which posits that competing demands and expectations lead to certain forms of conduct. Faculty members are institutionally rewarded for research, which creates role conflict and diminishes motivation to teach. Similar situations have been documented in the higher education systems of South Asia (Henadirage & Gunarathne, 2025). This study, however, extends understanding of this role conflict by demonstrating that it is not only structural but also includes emotional labor, identity tensions, and continual self-negotiation among faculty. However, this study builds on previous work by focusing on the emotional aspects and identity work occurring in the background of these conflicts.

Adding to the Bangladesh Context

This study is among the first empirically based analyses of pedagogical preparation and academic identity in Bangladeshi public universities. It shows that teacher preparation is not a technical matter but a complex issue involving the interplay among institutional context, teachers' professional identity, and motivation to teach. In doing so, the study contributes to the existing literature by contextualizing global theoretical frameworks within the particular socio-institutional realities of Bangladesh, rather than merely confirming their applicability.

Constraints and what remains to be known

The sample's selectivity among public universities may, in fact, limit generalizability, especially to private or specialized universities. Future research should broaden its scope to include educators from private universities and conduct comparative analyses between public and private settings to understand contextual differences in pedagogical practices better. Also, mixed-methods designs could be used to achieve both depth and breadth in teaching experiences. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to monitor pedagogical change over time and to analyze the impact of institutional reforms and professional development initiatives on teaching practices across different types of institutions.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy Implications

The national higher education authority needs to sustain recognition of excellence in teaching as equal to research. Compulsory training for new faculty and the incorporation of teaching-related metrics into promotion decisions are suggested.

Institutional Implications

Universities are to establish guidelines for mentoring, workshops for continuous training, and relief of teaching workload to support innovation. The institutional environment has to change to show teaching as an equally respectable academic pursuit.

Theoretical Contribution

This research combines elements of Social Constructivist Theory, Identity Theory, Role Theory, and Self-Determination Theory to create a multidimensional framework showing that pedagogical preparedness results

from a combination of a structural context, identity work, and various types of motivation. This framework may be relevant for other emerging higher education systems.

CONCLUSION

We conclude with an overview of our research on issues and obstacles faced by educators in Bangladesh's higher education system. Most educators enter the profession with little formal training, relying on experience and observing colleagues. Due to large class sizes and research-focused reward systems, they have limited scope for innovative teaching. However, educators show willingness to continue professional development and systemic reform. Universities and policymakers should value teaching equally with research, establish mentoring programs, and improve institutional culture. Future studies should examine the longitudinal effects of pedagogical programs on the development of higher education systems.

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