

Aligning Civil Service Training with Workplace Competencies: Examining the Law and Administration Course in Bangladesh

Dr. Mahmudul Hassan¹, Md. Forkan Elahi Anupam², Sabrina Afrin Mustafa³

Abstract

This article examines the extent to which the Law and Administration Course (LAC) aligns with the workplace competencies required of entry-level officers (ELOs) in the Bangladesh Civil Service (Administration) cadre. Conducted by the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy, the LAC is the principal professional course intended to prepare newly recruited officers for early-career responsibilities in field administration and secretariat work. The study is situated within the literature on competency-based training, learning transfer, public service capability, and results-oriented training evaluation. Using a mixed-methods design, the article draws on survey responses from 120 LAC participants, assessments from 30 supervising officers, focus group discussions, interviews with faculty members, and documentary analysis of course materials, duty charters, and relevant public administration policy documents. The findings indicate that the LAC is broadly relevant to statutory and procedural responsibilities, especially in legal literacy, land administration, service rules, and administrative procedure. However, notable gaps remain in analytical reasoning, applied legal interpretation, decision-support drafting, digital governance, managerial coordination, and the handling of complex cases under time constraints. These weaknesses appear to stem less from content irrelevance than from the absence of explicit competency benchmarks and from assessment practices that emphasise knowledge acquisition more than applied performance. The article argues that a concise competency framework, stronger job-linked simulations, and results-based assessment feedback would enhance the course's practical value and strengthen the transition from formal training to workplace performance.

Keywords: competency-based training; civil service training; public administration; workplace competencies; Bangladesh Civil Service; Law and Administration Course

¹email: hassan8173443@gmail.com; ²email: forkan3139@gmail.com;

³email: sabrinamustafa13@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In contemporary public administration, training is no longer treated merely as an institutional ritual or a formal requirement for confirmation in service. Increasingly it is judged by how well it equips public officials with the competencies needed for actual workplace performance. This shift has gained urgency as governments confront more complex policy problems, rising citizen expectations, digital transformation, and stronger demands for accountability. Training is therefore expected to produce not only knowledge, but also judgement, professional conduct, analytical reasoning, and the ability to apply rules in real administrative situations (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; OECD, 2017).

Competency-based training offers a useful lens for examining this relationship between training and work. Competencies are observable combinations of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavioural attributes, and professional judgement that enable effective performance in a defined role (Boyatzis, 2008; Campion et al., 2011). A competency-based approach therefore links course objectives, curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and feedback to clearly defined role expectations. It is especially relevant to public administration, where officials must operate within legal and procedural frameworks while also exercising discretion in complex, often time-sensitive situations (Horton, 2000; Lodge & Hood, 2003).

Within the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), entry-level officers of the Administration cadre occupy a critical position in the machinery of government. In their early postings, they are expected to process official files, prepare notes, interpret rules, assist in decision making, coordinate across offices, support land and revenue administration, and communicate with citizens and other public agencies. These are not purely clerical tasks: they demand legal awareness, administrative discipline, analytical judgement, drafting competence, ethical conduct, and a sound understanding of institutional roles.

The Law and Administration Course, conducted by the Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy, is intended to provide foundational professional preparation for these responsibilities. The official description of the course identifies it as a five-month course for newly appointed BCS Administration cadre officers and highlights criminal law, public administration, management, economics, language, information technology, behavioural science, civil service conduct, values, and practical learning

methods as important course components (Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy, n.d.). The Public Administration Training and Higher Education Policy 2023 also emphasises needs-based, interactive, and dynamic training to improve public service capacity (Ministry of Public Administration, 2023).

Despite this importance, the LAC does not appear to be anchored in a formally articulated competency framework of the kind recommended in the modern public-sector training literature. Its design has evolved through administrative practice, course revision, and participant feedback, but there is limited evidence of a documented mapping between early-career workplace responsibilities and measurable competency outcomes. This study examines that problem by asking not only whether participants find the course useful, but whether it develops the capabilities their initial postings actually require. The study addresses three research questions. First, what competencies are required for effective performance in entry-level administrative positions within the BCS Administration cadre? Second, to what extent does the LAC contribute to the development of these competencies among newly recruited officers? Third, where do gaps exist between competencies emphasised in the course and those demanded in workplace practice?

The objectives of the study are: (1) to identify the core competencies required for effective performance in entry-level administrative roles; (2) to assess the extent to which the LAC develops these competencies among trainee officers; and (3) to examine the alignment between competencies developed through the course and those required in workplace settings, with particular attention to areas of mismatch and competency gaps.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Competency-based training and public service performance

Competency-based training is one of the dominant approaches in contemporary human resource development because it starts from the requirements of the work itself rather than from an inherited syllabus. Under this approach, training is not judged by coverage, attendance, or satisfaction alone; it is judged by whether learners can demonstrate capabilities that are meaningful in the role for which they are being prepared (Armstrong, 2020; Dubois & Rothwell, 2004; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

The significance of this approach for the public sector is clear. Governments invest in training because officials are expected to implement law, manage

resources, coordinate institutions, and deliver services. A competency framework can clarify what effective performance looks like, provide a common language for course design, and connect recruitment, induction, supervision, appraisal, and career development (Campion et al., 2011; OECD, n.d.). When competencies remain implicit, however, training may appear relevant while still leaving important performance gaps unmeasured and unaddressed.

This distinction matters in bureaucratic systems, where public officials work within rules but rule-bound work does not eliminate discretion. Officers must often interpret legal provisions, distinguish relevant facts from irrelevant details, prioritise files, draft reasoned recommendations, and communicate decisions in institutionally acceptable language. Such performance depends on more than knowing the rules; it requires the capacity to apply knowledge in context (Horton, 2000; Lodge & Hood, 2003).

2.2 Training design, transfer of learning, and assessment fit

Training design concerns the deliberate arrangement of learning objectives, content, teaching methods, sequencing, practice opportunities, and assessment. Research on training transfer has long shown that learning is more likely to influence workplace performance when the training environment resembles the actual workplace and when trainees receive opportunities to practise, receive feedback, and apply learning under realistic conditions (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010; Burke & Hutchins, 2007).

In bureaucratic settings, this means that case exercises, simulations, note-writing practice, file-based analysis, legal interpretation drills, and structured feedback may matter more than content coverage alone. A course may be full of relevant material and still fail to produce strong workplace performance if participants are not required to apply knowledge under constraints similar to real work. Salas et al. (2012) similarly emphasise that effective training depends on evidence-based design, practice, feedback, and post-training conditions that support application.

Assessment is equally important. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2016) model remains influential because it distinguishes reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. In civil service training, this implies that participant satisfaction or written examination performance is not enough. If the desired outcome is workplace capability, assessment should test applied reasoning, drafting, decision-support capacity, and professional judgement. Noe (2017) similarly

treats assessment and transfer as integral parts of training effectiveness rather than as administrative afterthoughts.

2.3 Civil service training in Bangladesh and the research gap

The literature on public administration training in Bangladesh has examined institutional development, training effectiveness, and the broader relationship between civil service training and administrative reform. Earlier scholarship traces administrative training to colonial-era legacies and the post-independence search for a development-oriented bureaucracy (Aminuzzaman, 1992; Zafarullah, 2007), while other work has examined training effectiveness and institutional constraints, including the role of the BCS Administration Academy (Ehsan & Imam, 2020).

Recent Bangladesh-specific work has moved closer to the present article's concern. Hassan et al. (2025) argue that the LAC would benefit from contextualised pedagogy and stronger integration of real-world tasks, institutional objectives, and adult learning principles. Their analysis of LAC modules also indicates that some course components have immediate relevance to field administration, while others have weaker direct applicability to early-career duties. This reinforces the need to examine not only whether training exists, but whether its content, methods, and assessments fit the work officers actually perform.

The issue is also visible in broader policy and evaluation documents. The Public Administration Training and Higher Education Policy 2023 calls for stronger, needs-based public administration training (Ministry of Public Administration, 2023). More recently, UNDP's Evaluation Framework for Government Training Institutes reported that Bangladesh's public-sector training institutions show strengths in infrastructure and delivery but still face gaps in outcome measurement, research, and learning impact; it recommends competency-based training, stronger monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems, faculty development, and phased reforms (UNDP, 2026).

A gap nonetheless remains. Much of the existing literature evaluates training in broad terms such as satisfaction, perceived utility, institutional capacity, or overall learning, and fewer studies systematically examine how a specific course design corresponds to the competency profile implied by actual early-career workplace duties. This gap matters particularly for the LAC, given its central role in the professional formation of entry-level officers in the BCS Administration cadre. The present study addresses it by analysing competency alignment directly, rather than training effectiveness in the

abstract.

3. Conceptual Framework

The study proceeds from an inductive conceptual logic. In the absence of a formally published competency framework for the LAC, competency requirements are inferred from three sources: the duties of newly posted officers, expectations expressed by supervising officers, and the stated objectives and contents of the LAC. This approach is consistent with competency modelling literature, which treats role analysis and expert judgement as important foundations for identifying performance-relevant competencies (Campion et al., 2011; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

Seven competency domains emerge with particular clarity: (1) legal and regulatory literacy; (2) land administration competency; (3) administrative procedure and file-management competency; (4) development, policy, analytical, and decision-support capacity; (5) managerial and coordination competency; (6) digital governance competency; and (7) communication, behaviour, and professional discipline.

The central analytical proposition is straightforward. If the content, pedagogy, and assessment methods of the LAC correspond closely to these competency domains, participants should demonstrate a reasonable level of workplace readiness after course completion. If the alignment is only partial because some competencies remain implicit or because assessment tests recall more than application, competency development is likely to be uneven. The study therefore treats competency alignment as a three-dimensional issue involving content relevance, pedagogical adequacy, and assessment fit.

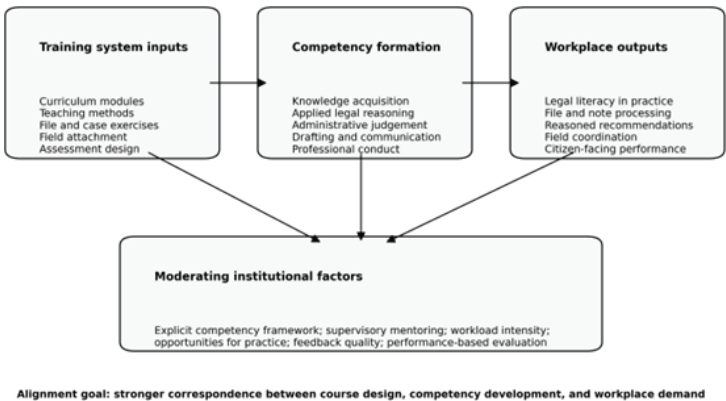


Figure 1. Competency alignment model for the Law and Administration Course

The model conceptualises training effectiveness as a linked process. Training system inputs shape competency formation; competency formation should then appear as workplace outputs. Institutional factors, including the presence or absence of an explicit competency framework, quality of supervision, workload intensity, and the assessment system, mediate this relationship.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and data sources

A mixed-methods design was used to support methodological triangulation. The quantitative component consisted of a structured survey administered to 120 participants from a single LAC cohort. The cohort was treated as a complete census for that batch. The time gap of more than one year between course completion and data collection was considered useful because it allowed respondents to assess the relevance of the course after exposure to workplace responsibilities.

The qualitative component consisted of focus group discussions with selected LAC graduates, interviews with BCSAA faculty members, and structured assessments from 30 supervising officers who had worked with the graduates for at least six months in field administration or secretariat positions. Documentary analysis was also conducted using course curricula, training schedules, official duty charters, and relevant public administration policy documents, including the Public Administration Training and Higher Education Policy 2023

4.2 Measures and analytical strategy

The survey asked respondents to assess the relevance of seven competency clusters using a five-point Likert scale. The clusters were derived from focus group evidence, faculty consultations, supervising officer expectations, and documentary analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, particularly mean scores and standard deviations across competency categories.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically. The analysis focused on recurring patterns in participant and supervisor accounts of preparedness, workplace demand, competency strengths, and competency gaps. The documentary analysis was used to compare stated course content and assessment practices with competencies implied by entry-level administra-

tive duties. The study does not claim causal attribution; rather, it evaluates perceived and documented alignment between training design and workplace demand.

4.3 Scope and limitations

The study is limited by its focus on a single LAC cohort. The survey data are descriptive and depend partly on respondents' perceptions. Supervising officer assessments provide an external perspective, but they also reflect variation in office contexts, supervisory expectations, and the nature of assignments given to new officers. The study should therefore be read as an evidence-based diagnosis of competency alignment rather than as a comprehensive evaluation of the entire LAC system across all cohorts.

A further limitation concerns outcome measurement. The study does not use direct observation of file work or independently scored performance tasks. Future studies should incorporate workplace performance records, standardised drafting tasks, and longitudinal follow-up to assess whether training-related competencies are retained and applied over time.

5. Findings

5.1 Perceived relevance of competency clusters

Based on focus group discussions, faculty consultations, supervising officer feedback, and documentary analysis, the course curriculum was organised into seven competency clusters. Respondents then rated the relevance of each cluster to their workplace responsibilities. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Table 1. Perceived relevance of core competency clusters in the LAC

Competency cluster	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Legal and regulatory competency	4.16	0.72	Strong alignment
Land administration competency	4.34	0.61	Very strong alignment
Administrative procedure and file management	3.99	0.78	Moderate to strong alignment
Development, policy knowledge, and decision support	3.66	0.81	Moderate relevance
Managerial and coordination competency	3.59	0.84	Weaker alignment
Digital governance competency	3.53	0.88	Weakest alignment
Communication, behaviour, and professional discipline	3.72	0.76	Moderate alignment

Note. n = 120. Scores are based on a five-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate stronger perceived relevance to workplace responsibilities.

The results show clear variation across competency clusters. Land administration recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.34), followed by legal and regulatory competency (M = 4.16). These results indicate that

respondents perceive the traditional legal and administrative components of the LAC as highly relevant to the responsibilities performed by newly appointed officers. Administrative procedure and file management also recorded a relatively strong mean score ($M = 3.99$), suggesting that the course provides a useful procedural foundation.

By contrast, digital governance ($M = 3.53$) and managerial and coordination competency ($M = 3.59$) received the lowest mean scores. These domains also showed comparatively higher standard deviations, indicating less consensus among respondents. The variation may reflect differences in workplace assignments, unequal exposure to digital tools, and differing supervisory expectations. The broader pattern is that the LAC is strongest in traditional statutory and procedural domains, while its alignment is weaker in newer or more practice-dependent domains of administrative work.

5.2 Workplace context and early-career role demands

The majority of LAC graduates were posted to field administration shortly after completing the course, primarily as Assistant Commissioners (Land) or Assistant Commissioners in Deputy Commissioners' offices. A smaller proportion were posted to the Secretariat. These initial postings required routine application of legal, administrative, drafting, coordination, and analytical competencies.

Supervising officers reported that new officers were expected to process official files, prepare notes and draft decisions, examine records, interpret laws and government rules, and provide reasoned recommendations for senior decision makers. These tasks required not only technical knowledge but also accuracy, prioritisation, procedural discipline, and the ability to convert learning into administratively useful outputs.

5.3 Areas of strong alignment

The evidence indicates that the LAC is broadly aligned with the statutory and procedural dimensions of early-career administrative work. Participants reported moderate to high levels of competency development in legal literacy, administrative procedure, service rules, and land-related laws. Land administration modules were especially valued, which is unsurprising given the centrality of land matters in field administration.

Supervising officers broadly confirmed this assessment. They observed that LAC graduates generally arrived with a reasonable command of relevant rules, basic procedural discipline, and awareness of official formats. These

strengths matter. In bureaucratic practice, legal awareness and procedural compliance are not peripheral capabilities; they are foundational to administrative legitimacy, record integrity, and public trust.

5.4 Persistent competency gaps

The more difficult question is whether the LAC develops higher-order competencies once officers move beyond rule recognition into applied judgement. Here the findings are more qualified. Participants reported weaker preparation in analytical decision support, applied problem solving, and the handling of complex or ambiguous cases.

Supervising officers, while generally satisfied with basic preparedness, repeatedly identified deficiencies in analytical reasoning, prioritisation, anticipatory judgement, and decision-support drafting. These concerns were most visible in high-pressure field contexts, where officers face large volumes of files, tight timelines, inter-agency coordination problems, and cases that do not fit neatly into standard procedural templates. Under such conditions, competence depends not only on what an officer knows, but on how effectively the officer can sort facts, interpret rules, weigh alternatives, and draft concise recommendations.

5.5 Curriculum relevance, balance, and assessment practice

A further finding concerns curriculum balance. Documentary evidence and respondent feedback suggest that some areas of the course are closely aligned with immediate workplace responsibilities, while other components appear more general or indirectly relevant. This does not mean that general learning, language skills, or broader public administration content have no value. Rather, the issue is one of priority within a finite professional course whose mandate is to prepare newly appointed officers for immediate administrative work.

The evidence also suggests an assessment gap. Traditional written examinations and viva voce remain useful for testing knowledge, but they are less capable of measuring applied judgement unless they are designed around realistic administrative problems. If officers are expected to draft reasoned notes, interpret ambiguous legal provisions, prioritise files, and coordinate across offices, the assessment system should require them to demonstrate these capabilities. This is the point at which curriculum relevance, pedagogy, and assessment fit must be treated as a single alignment problem.

Table 2. Key competency gaps and recommended course-level responses

Observed gap	Workplace implication	Recommended response
Applied legal interpretation	Difficulty handling cases that do not fit routine templates	Use realistic case files requiring legal interpretation and reasoned recommendations
Analytical decision support	Weakness in sorting facts, weighing options, and advising senior officers	Introduce structured note-writing, problem analysis, and decision-memo exercises
Digital governance	Uneven confidence in e-services, digital records, and data-supported administration	Increase hands-on digital governance labs linked to actual administrative platforms
Managerial coordination	Difficulty coordinating across offices under time pressure	Use simulation exercises involving inter-office coordination, prioritisation, and stakeholder communication
Performance-based assessment	High knowledge scores may not translate into workplace capability	Add rubrics for file notes, case analysis, drafting quality, and judgement under constraints

Note. The recommendations are derived from the alignment analysis and are intended as course-design options rather than exhaustive reform proposals.

6. Discussion

The overall picture is one of partial, rather than incomplete, competency alignment. The LAC is neither irrelevant nor ineffective, it provides an important institutional foundation in legal knowledge, procedural familiarity, land administration, and professional discipline. The problem is more specific: the course is strongest in areas that can be taught and tested through conventional instruction, and weaker in areas that require structured practice, realistic simulation, and performance-based assessment.

This finding is consistent with the training-transfer literature: learning does not automatically move from classroom to workplace simply because the topic appears relevant (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Blume et al., 2010). Transfer is more likely when training includes realistic practice, feedback, and conditions that support application (Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Salas et al., 2012). The LAC appears to transmit useful knowledge, but it does not yet convert all of that knowledge into consistently reliable workplace capability. The findings also support competency-based approaches to public-sector training. A competency framework need not be elaborate to be useful: even a concise framework defining expected entry-level performance in legal reasoning, file management, drafting, coordination, digital governance, and professional conduct would improve course planning and assessment. It would also make it easier to distinguish content that is broadly educational from content that is directly necessary for immediate workplace performance.

The Bangladesh context makes this issue especially pressing. Early-career officers often enter demanding field assignments where they must learn quickly while carrying real administrative responsibilities. Supervisory mentoring remains essential, but formal training should reduce, rather than simply transfer, the burden of initial capability development to the workplace. Where the gap between formal training and workplace demand remains too wide, the strategic value of the training itself is weakened.

7. Policy Implications

First, the BCSAA and the Ministry of Public Administration should develop a concise competency framework for the LAC. The framework should be derived from actual entry-level duties and should define the minimum expected level of performance in each competency domain. Such a framework would clarify course purpose, improve curriculum planning, and provide a stronger basis for evaluation.

Second, the pedagogical mix should move further toward applied and problem-based learning. Case studies should be designed around realistic field situations rather than simplified textbook scenarios. File-note drafting, supervised legal interpretation, prioritisation under workload pressure, and cross-office coordination exercises could be incorporated more deliberately. Field attachment would be more valuable if it were structured around specific competencies to be observed, practised, and reflected upon.

Third, assessment methods should be better aligned with workplace performance. Written examinations and viva voce can remain important, but they should be supplemented by tasks that test reasoning, drafting, and judgement in practical administrative situations. Rubrics should distinguish between familiarity with rules and the capacity to use rules intelligently in context.

Fourth, course revision should rely not only on participant and faculty feedback, but also on systematic evidence from supervisors and post-training workplace experience. This would close the loop between training design and workplace reality. It would also be consistent with the broader move toward results-oriented public-sector training evaluation emphasised in recent evaluation frameworks for government training institutions (UNDP, 2026).

8. Conclusion

This article examined the alignment between training design and workplace competencies in the LAC for entry-level officers of the Bangladesh Civil

Service (Administration) cadre. The evidence suggests that the course remains a relevant and important institutional foundation, developing legal literacy, procedural awareness, land administration knowledge, and professional discipline in ways that are clearly valuable to newly posted officers.

At the same time, the course does not develop all competencies with equal force. Analytical reasoning, applied legal interpretation, decision-support drafting, digital governance, managerial coordination, and realistic problem solving remain important areas of weakness. These weaknesses are not simply matters of missing content. They reflect a deeper alignment issue: competencies are not yet defined explicitly enough, and assessments do not consistently test the forms of applied performance that early-career administrative work requires.

The central contribution of the study is to show that competency ambiguity carries real practical consequences: training can appear successful while important performance gaps remain unaddressed. The policy lesson is not that the LAC requires wholesale redesign, but that it needs clearer competency articulation, stronger practice-based pedagogy, and assessment tools that capture how officers are expected to think and act in real administrative settings. Such reforms would make the course more coherent, more measurable, and more faithful to the realities of bureaucratic work in Bangladesh.

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