



Countless students drop out, schools close

Shahin Akhter | Published: Oct 01, 2021

Countless students across the country have dropped out of schools and other educational institutions during the Covid pandemic while various private educational institutions, mostly primary, have remained closed after the reopening of the educational institutions.

While many girl students in largely rural areas have, meanwhile, been married off, many others, both male and female, have joined work to support their families.

Besides, a huge number of teachers and employees, who had worked in hitherto closed educational institutions, have switched to other occupations for survival during the crisis. Experts of various sectors blamed, in a nutshell, the increase in poverty induced by the Covid outbreak for the situation.

The New Age correspondents in various districts have gathered relevant primary information on the situation while authorities concerned said that they were yet to have relevant statistics compiled from across the country as the schools and colleges had just reopened on September 12 after a long closure of one and a half years.

From March 18, 2020, the classroom activities of the educational institutions across the country remained suspended due to the Covid situation and in-person classes in primary to higher secondary institutions have resumed on a limited scale since September 12. Bangladesh Kindergarten School and College Oikya Parishad chairman M Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury has recently told New Age that about 20,000 of the 60,000 kindergarten schools across the country have been shut during the Covid crisis due to financial constraints.

'About 90 per cent of these schools were run in rented houses and were dependent on tuition fees to manage the school expenditure,' he pointed out, adding that many kindergarten teachers, too, have switched professions in the meantime.

Economist and former caretaker government adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman on Thursday said that lesson losses, beside poverty, were also a major reason for the dropout of many students.

‘Poor male students, who have joined work due to poverty, need incentive to return to schools,’ he viewed.

Campaign for Popular Education deputy director KM Enamul Hoque said that the presence in the classes had declined after the educational institutions were reopened. ‘Poverty is one of the major causes of this situation as many parents have suffered job or income losses during the pandemic,’ he said.

Enamul remarked that the government should conduct a ‘back-to-school campaign’ for those students that have left their studies and are reluctant to come back to school.

‘If jobs or work for marginalised people cannot be created, then they would naturally be deprived of services in the education and health sectors,’ he said, demanding a 15–20 per cent budget allocation for the education sector.

He mentioned that many people in the capital city had sent their families to their ancestral village homes because of a fall in their income, with children of such families being displaced and losing the opportunity to join schools at new places.

‘Survival became their first priority in the situation, not education,’ he said.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad president Fauzia Moslem on Thursday said that poverty was the main reason for the dropout of students.

‘Due to poverty, many female students have been married off, who are now at an increased risk of violence, while male students have left schools and quit their studies,’ she went on.

Professor Md Abdul Halim, director of the Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University, also said that many girl students had been given in marriage while many male students had taken up work to support their families due to their worsened financial condition arising out of the pandemic.

‘Besides, as private educational institutions did not have students during the pandemic many such institutions had been closed down, he added.

Alamgir Mohammad Mansurul Alam, director general of the Directorate of Primary Education, on Thursday said that no educational institutions under the primary and mass education ministry had been shut and no students had dropped out.

‘We are not accountable for the private educational institutions,’ he said, adding that the attendance of students at the government schools is more than 73 per cent.

Professor Syed Md Golam Faruk, directorate general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, told New Age on Sunday that they did not have any information

about any approved educational institutions being closed down, saying that they did not have information about the unapproved institutions.

They are also yet to obtain the number of dropped-out students, he added.

The New Age correspondent in Chattogram reported: Around 300 kindergarten schools that were run by private individuals or entities have been shut down in Chattogram during the Covid crisis due to financial crisis, according to Bangladesh Kindergarten School and College Oikya Parishad Chattogram district president Professor Habib Rahmat Ullah.

Among these, some 100 kindergarten schools have been closed in Chattogram city while the rest have been shut down in the districts of the division as the teachers of these institutions did not get any salary during the pandemic, he said.

The students of the closed institutions have shifted to other schools while most of the teachers and employees of these institutions have moved to other occupations.

Our Rajshahi correspondent, quoting Golam Sarwar Swapan, president of Rajshahi Kindergarten and Pre-Cadet School Association, reported that approximately 160 private educational institutions had shut down their operations due to financial crisis while more than 4,000 teachers and employees of these schools had changed their profession, affecting some 35,000 students in Rajshahi.

Yunus Ali, a former teacher of Green Child Kindergarten in Rajshahi, told New Age that he had left his teaching job as he did not get any salary during the pandemic.

He has started a business in his locality, he said.

The Cumilla New Age correspondent, quoting Abul Kalam Azad, president of the Kindergarten Association, reported that as the teachers of various kindergarten schools have changed their profession so 12 kindergarten schools in Titas upazila of Cumilla ceased their operation.

Darikandi Latif Nagar Cambrian School director Jahangir Alam said that many students had taken to work due to the long closure of the school.

According to Subrati Shahjadi Memorial Multipurpose High School head teacher Mohammad Noor Alam Siddiqui, as a number of female students of Class IX and Class X of his school had been married off during the pandemic there was no chance that they would return to the school.

Sadar Dakshin upazila's Kamalpur Secondary School head teacher Md Mominul Islam said that about 35 per cent of the students of classes IX and X, mostly female, were still absent from the school after it was reopened.

Mawdud Ahmed, general secretary, executive committee, Sylhet District Kindergarten Association, told New Age that 34 kindergarten schools had been permanently closed down in the district because of financial crisis, the New Age correspondent in Sylhet reported.

Almost all of these kindergarten institutions ran their academic activities in rented houses and depended on tuition and examination fees to pay for the costs, including the house rent and the salaries of the teachers and the staff, he added.

Our Sirajganj correspondent reported that the incidence of early marriages had gone up among students of the secondary institutions in the district while Chauhali upazila nirbahi officer Md Anisur Rahman said that they had prevented at least 50 child marriages with the help of mobile courts.

Ashraful Islam, principal of Railway Colony School and College in Sirajganj Sadar upazila, said that 30–40 per cent of students did not submit their assignments during the closure of the institution while they heard that some schoolgirls had been married off while some students had started working to support their families.

Education minister Dipu Moni on Tuesday at an event told reporters that many parents were afraid to send their children to educational institutions because of some content in social media.

‘Most of the institutions that have been closed were not approved, not registered and took classes in rented houses,’ she said, adding that if these institutions were registered they could get government incentives.

Meanwhile, due to fallout of the Covid outbreak, some 2.45 crore vulnerable non-poor people, 14.7 per cent of the country’s total population, have slipped into poverty, revealed a survey, jointly conducted by Power and Participation Research Centre and BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, on April 20, 2021.

The upper poverty rate in the country has reached 30 per cent of the population as an adverse impact of the pandemic, said the World Bank in its latest report released on April 12, 2021.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the estimated national poverty rate was 20.5 per cent in 2019.

But, according to an earlier survey conducted by the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling, revealed on January 23, 2021, the upper poverty rate in Bangladesh has increased from 21.6 per cent in 2018 to 42 per cent in 2020 while the lower poverty rate went up from 9.4 per cent in 2018 to 28.5 per cent in 2020.

Campaign for Popular Education on January 19 published its Education Watch Study 2020–21 (Phase 1) report titled ‘Interim Report: Reopening Schools – When and How’ in which some 38 per cent of primary school teachers believed that around 20 per cent of students could drop out.

A Manusher Jonno Foundation report, published on January 9, 2021, showed that there was a 7 per cent spike in child marriages in 2020 when at least 101 child marriages were reported and more than 6,000 child-marriage attempts were prevented.

A report of BRAC Education Programme and BRAC Advocacy for Social Change observed that the increase in child marriages had raised the likelihood of girls dropping out of school.