

# THE BUSINESS STANDARD

## Data deficiency, automatic promotions worsen learning losses

A survey conducted by Brac Institute of Governance and Development finds that 7.86 million primary and secondary school students suffered learning losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic

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**Rafiul Islam (not his real name), a class-X student of Ideal School and College, is going to sit for his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations 2022. As he could only attend a few classes with a shortened syllabus due to the pandemic-induced school closures, he secured a promotion with learning losses intact.**

"I learnt a little from my Class IX and X syllabuses during the pandemic. Not only academic knowledge, we missed extracurricular activities too. Now, our classes have resumed and will continue for 150 days, but it will be tough for us to complete the syllabus," Rafiul said.

Rafiul isn't the only student concerned about learning losses.

Mamun Hossain, a student of Char Kukri Mukri Government Primary School in Charfession upazila in Bhola district, was a student of Class III when the schools were closed.

He is now going to pass the fifth grade with little knowledge on core subjects like Bangla, English and Mathematics.

Rahima Khanam, acting head teacher of the school, is aware of the situation and told The Business Standard that many of her students had faced learning losses.

The picture is the same everywhere else, worsened by the lack of data on the matter.

### **Data deficit means more problems**

Although the education sector is among the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, the government did not do any research to find the extent of the learning losses. As a result, a lot of students this year attended their new classes with inadequate knowledge. While they all secured promotion, the government has no data on how much they had failed to learn.

Professor Syed Golam Faruk, director general at the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, told TBS that they are conducting research to identify the learning gap, but it would take time.

"Our main focus is to continue in-person classes," he said.

Exacerbating the data crisis, The Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (Banbeis) and National Academy for Primary Education (Nape), which usually conduct surveys about primary to higher secondary education, were not asked to hold such surveys this year.

Habibur Rahman, director general of Banbeis, told TBS that they are now busy with other activities.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a Nape official told The Business Standard that a proposal had been made to conduct research in October last year, but the authorities concerned asked them to stay away from it.

"Nape always helps the government to get authentic data. It would have been possible to know the actual situation also. But now the government has no data on the field level situation," he said.

Recently, a survey conducted by Brac Institute of Governance and Development found that as many as 7.86 million primary and secondary school students suffered learning losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

A total of 22% of primary school students and 30% of secondary school students suffered learning losses during the school closures, the survey said.

The survey was based on interviews of 4,872 people in rural and urban slums twice across the country, first in March 2021 and then in August the same year.

### **Previous remedial packages halted**

The implementation of two remedial packages that the government prepared to recover students' learning losses has been halted.

The packages consisted of a shortened syllabus focusing on key lessons that could not be delivered amid the shutdowns.

Prof Narayan Chandra Saha, chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), told TBS on Sunday that they had planned to execute the remedial packages on 30 March, but it could not be done due to school closures.

"The reopening of schools was late and the implementation of the remedial packages was halted. The ministry did not provide any more direction to make new packages," he added.

The packages were aimed to allow students to reach expected competencies in basic subjects.

### **No JSC, PEC exams this year**

The government had promoted all pre-primary to higher secondary level students without holding any examinations.

The HSC examinees were given results on the basis of their SSC and Junior School Certificate exams results.

This year the ministry will not hold any JSC and PEC examinations. But the students will be promoted after holding annual school examinations.

### **Urgent recommendations falling on deaf ears**

Dr Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus at Brac University, said it is regrettable that the government was yet to take any initiative to recover learning losses, stressing it must be done soon at any cost.

"The students were promoted automatically. The online classes were not the most effective. And that is why the students faced learning losses. Now recovering learning losses is a must," he said.

He said it will be impossible to implement remedial packages, urging the government to shorten the existing syllabi amid an already shortened academic year.

"I have asked the government on several occasions to formulate a two-year plan for learning recovery which will include basic topics from Bangla and Mathematics for primary students, and Bangla, Mathematics, English, and Science for secondary pupils. Unfortunately, the government has ignored it," he added.

He said the government had been urged to increase the amount of stipend to poor students and provide their families with financial support, but the education ministry had ignored this suggestion too.

Mizanur Rahman Sarker, secretary general of Bangladesh Kindergarten Association, said about 15,000 private educational institutions were closed permanently. The students of these schools were affected severely.

