

Edn sector reels from learning losses, fear for unskilled generation

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The students belonging to primary and secondary levels are faced with severe learning losses that started from the Covid-19 pandemic, continuing till now through different challenging circumstances, including the ones leading to the country's political changeover.

Educationists and activists have cautioned that if the situation continues, an unskilled generation bereft of learning competencies will burden the country in the future, instead of becoming boons.

Most recently the government primary and secondary level students have gone to over a month-long holiday without having all the free textbooks from the government.

Experiments on the national curriculum, auto pass for public examinations, frequent change in decisions, attacks on teachers and natural calamities are also major reasons behind learning loss, they observed.

They urged the authorities to take a comprehensive strategy to recover the learning losses by keeping in perspective the demands of the changing world.

Against this backdrop, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education under the education ministry on Tuesday published a circular on its website for the secondary level students that said the government formulated a strategy to identify the learning deficits and provide remedial support to address them.

Order was given to study, realise and implement the strategy in detail in all secondary level educational institutions.

‘Currently anything and everything is happening in the education sector,’ said Professor M Wahiduzzaman of the Institute of Education and Research at Dhaka University.

The government is doing nothing to control the situation, he alleged.

BRAC University Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed observes that learning loss has been aggravated by the pandemic as well as the confusion triggered by the recent curriculum reform.

‘The circular mentions COVID loss, but does not quite recognise the prevailing pedagogy deficiencies,’ he said referring to the Tuesday circular.

Campaign for Popular Education deputy director Mostafizur Rahaman said that the country was facing the challenges of generation gap.

‘The students who were in Class I in 2020 are now in secondary level and the students who were in secondary level in 2020 passed that level by now,’ he said, adding that these students passed their levels by learning almost nothing amid the challenging circumstances.

From February 26, a straight 40-day holiday began in all government primary schools mainly for the month of Ramadan, while from February 28 a 38-day holiday began in the secondary and junior secondary-level government and non-government educational institutions.

According to the primary and mass education ministry, in the entire 2025 the students will have 185 school days due to weekends and different holidays.

Till February 24, around five crore out of nearly 39 crore free textbooks had yet to be printed, officials at the National Curriculum and Textbook Board said.

During the pandemic classroom activities were closed for around 18 months, an education ministry research conducted in 2022 revealed.

The same research showed that among the secondary level students the level of learning loss was 76 per cent in the English subject and 69 per cent in mathematics.

Since the beginning of 2024, natural calamities of cold wave, heatwave and flood caused closures of educational institutions for several times.

The July-August mass uprising that ousted the Awami League regime forcing Sheikh Hasina to step down and flee to India also led to the closure of educational institutions in the middle of July. Normalcy returned after the classroom activities reopened in the mid-August.

The authorities cancelled some of the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations following student protests and published results following subject mapping on Secondary School Certificate results.

Educational institutions across the country faced vacancies due to forced resignations mostly by the students.

Humiliation of some teachers at places drew huge criticisms as video clips of some of the incidents went viral.

The interim government decided to print textbooks for 2025 as per the 2012 curriculum instead of 2023 curriculum and introduce a new curriculum in 2026.

Changes in the curriculum, revision of textbooks, the cancellation of previous tenders and fresh tenders caused delay in the printing of textbooks.

Professor M Wahiduzzaman said that teachers are the best curriculum.

'All over the country the teachers are upset in the humiliating incidents,' he said, asking, 'how the teachers will teach the students in this situation?'

Frequent changes in the curriculum also affected the learning loss situation badly, he added.

Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed, also head of the consultation committee on quality improvement of primary and non-formal education formed by the interim government, said usually majority of children not being ready for the syllabus and lesson plans for a grade is the common feature in Bangladesh's schools.

He said that teachers teach by the syllabus, not by the learners' level here.

Basic change has to happen in pedagogy with a lot of room for remedial lessons while funds have to be available for the extra lessons and recruitment of para-teachers for this purpose, he adds.

Mostafizur Rahaman mentioned about the pandemic and political unrest started in September 2023 before the national election in January 2024.

'Since then many students due to learning losses and instability in the education sector got involved in crimes and many became victims of child marriage,' he said.

Mostafizur also said that this unskilled generation would severely lack the competencies to meet the demands of the future world based on artificial intelligence and Sustainable Development Goals.

'We need to find a new comprehensive strategy to check the learning losses by keeping the 4th industrial revolution in view,' he added.

The Tuesday circular gave some recommendations to fill the learning gaps, including use of methods like diagnostic assessment in the educational institutions.

The recommendations included a central remedial programme, distance-learning and extra classes.