

School dropouts must be stopped for GDP growth: discussion

Staff Correspondent  07 November, 2025, 01:24 [School supplies](#)

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People related to mass education campaigns under government and non-government entities on Thursday said that checking sexual harassment in schools, child marriage, and corruption in education system are crucial for protecting the investment against dropouts.

At a roundtable discussion in the capital Dhaka while unveiling the Bengali translation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's 2024 report titled The Price of Inaction, they also recommended strong political will, coordinated efforts, incentivising teachers with adequate training and salaries and social awareness to keep the students in classrooms.

Jointly organised by the primary and mass education ministry, the National Academy for Educational Management and UNESCO, the discussion also highlighted the barriers to disseminating quality education.

Following the welcome speech of Norihide Furukawa, UNESCO Dhaka's head of education, UNESCO headquarters-based programme specialist, Matthias Eck, presented a keynote.

Mattias said that school dropout and educational gaps cost the global economy \$10,000 billion a year.

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In his presentation, it was said that Bangladesh would see reduced GDP, 19.18 per cent in revenue earnings, equivalent to \$1,124, and 9.14 per cent from private expenditures, equivalent to \$502 million, in 2030 due to school dropout.

Because of less skilled manpower as the consequence of school dropout, Bangladesh could witness economic expenditures and social expenditures, 14.27 per cent and 25.73 per cent respectively, of the estimated GDP in 2023.

Citing the non-monetary losses in Bangladesh, Matthias said that early pregnancy and homicides could be raised to 69 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively, due to school dropout.

He also said that one to two per cent of GDP could be increased if Bangladesh reduces 10 per cent of school dropouts of the current trend.

According to UNESCO estimation in 2023, Bangladesh spent 2.1 per cent of its GDP in education.

Discussing the UNESCO report, primary and mass education ministry's additional secretary, Noorjahan Khatun, said the country struggled to coordinate government services in 17 different types of fragmented education systems.

'In absence of a universal system, focusing on inclusive education becomes a big challenge. Failures in this task make the underprivileged students more marginalised,' Noorjahan said.

She urged the media and educationists to contribute more to policy advocacy for minimising the challenges.

She also stressed for increasing budgetary allocation in education, incentivising school teachers, checking drug addiction and child marriage for controlling school dropout.

Non-government organisation Institute of Informatics and Development's senior joint director Sunjida Rahman said that sexual harassment must be stopped to check girls' dropout.

Probin Tripura from the same organisation said availability of schools and mother tongue-based textbooks are necessary for checking dropouts at the remote areas like in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Brac University's emeritus professor Manzoor Ahmed, NAEM director general Zulfeqar Haider, researcher Musharraf Tansen, among others, also spoke.