Education for Tomorrow in Light of the Election Manifesto

New Thinking, New Structure, and New Initiatives

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Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh
এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

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PART 1

Introducing the Study

The Context

- **Education has been one of the brightest stars of Bangladesh's development story over the years**, as evident in Bangladesh’s achievement of the MDGs and rising HDI scores, driven in part by education
- The economic development trajectory of Bangladesh indicates that its resource endowment has been predominantly characterised by labour
- Moving forward, the nation's developmental success is expected to depend significantly on human resource development, particularly in the area of education.
- Indeed, **the young labour force played a critical role** in powering Bangladesh’s economic development trajectory
- But the **demographic window of opportunity is elapsing,** and the time to invest is not unlimited!
- Over the last decade and a half, **achievements in the education system have plateaued**, and in some areas the **trajectory has reversed**
- The system has been held in place by narratives that were relevant in the 2000s but need rethinking in 2026

Introducing the Study

The Points of Departure

1. **Education is a human right** and not a service to be delivered when fiscally convenient, but as an unconditional entitlement of every child, regardless of geography, income, gender, language, or ability
2. **Education is a vehicle to develop the capabilities of every citizen.** Education can not be equated to certification, content recall, examination performance, but the genuine capacity development of every person to think critically and learn.

The Objectives of the Study

1. To establish a new narrative on education grounded in whole-child development, leading to a national agenda
2. To objectively review the relevant election pledges against the question of whether they are designed, resourced, and sequenced to deliver
3. To lay out the first step towards an action plan for a national education agenda

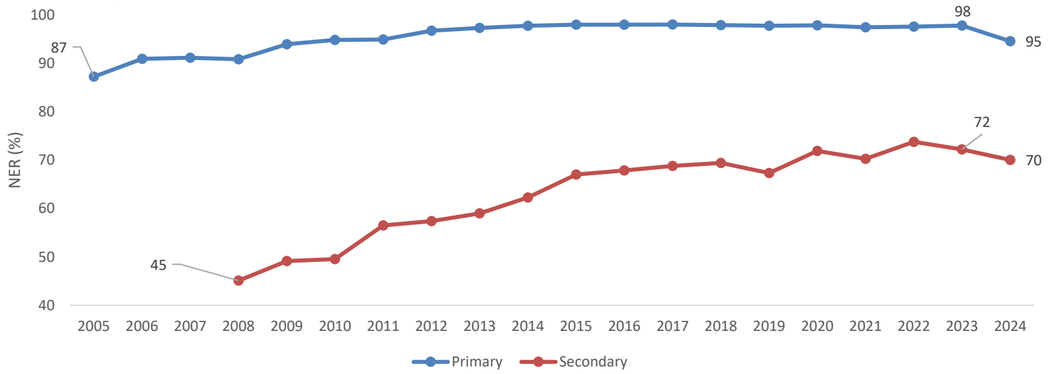
This study builds on a strong base of research and evidence generated by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, including a policy brief initiative, with publications focused on SDG 4, the education budget, and other research work and publications in primary education and technical education.

Deconstructing the “Official” Narratives

PART 2

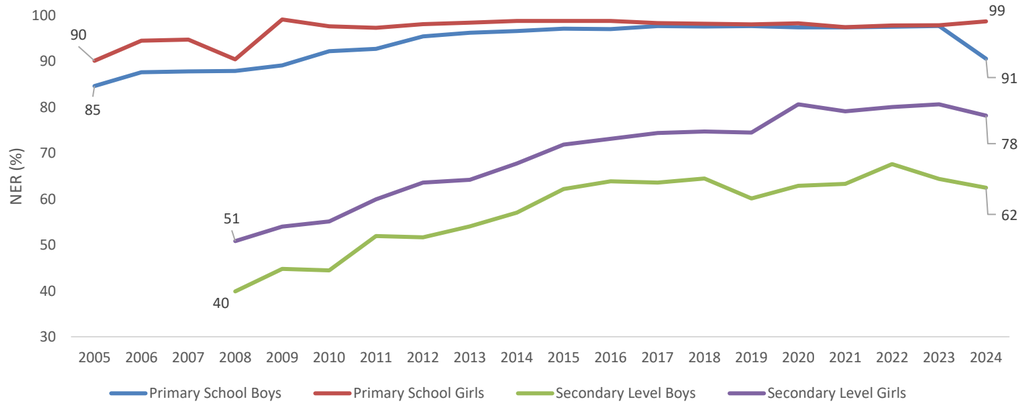
Official Narrative 1: “Bangladesh achieved near-universal primary enrolment and dramatically expanded secondary access over two decades while students are staying longer in the school system”

Figure: % Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of Primary and Secondary Levels.



Source: Authors’ compilation based on APSC 2023, APSC 2010

Figure: % Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of Primary and Secondary Levels (gender – wise)



Source: Authors’ compilation based on APSC 2023, APSC 2010

The genuine, documented gains, acknowledged internationally:

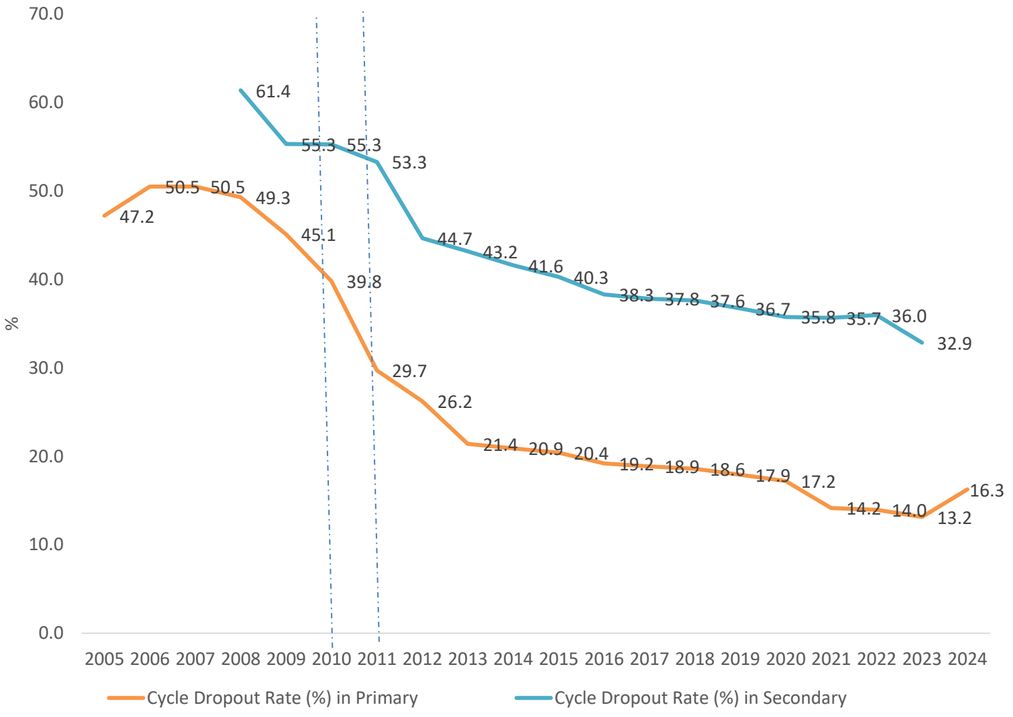
- **Primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER) rose steadily**:
- **Secondary NER more than doubled**
- **Girls' enrolment surpassed boys** at both primary and secondary levels
- **Gender Parity Index (GPI) now exceeds 1.0 —** meaning more girls than boys are in school

Official Narrative 1: "Bangladesh achieved near-universal primary enrolment and dramatically expanded secondary access over two decades while students are staying longer in the school system"

- **Primary survival rate** (i.e., the share of Grade 1 children who reach Grade 5) grew **from 67% (2010) to 87% (2023)**
- Girls consistently outperform boys on retention: higher survival rates, lower dropout rates
- Two reasons behind this trend:
  1. 2011 was the first year of PEDP 3, which introduced enrolment campaigns and community mobilisation efforts to keep students in schools, as well as stipends, free textbook distribution, and school feeding programmes.
  2. The PECE exam is cited as a major driver for increased retention, "as more pupils outside of GPS/NNPS appeared in this PECE." (DPE, 2017)

The system is retaining children. Dropping out is becoming less common. Girls are leading the way.

Figure: Cycle Dropout Trends in Primary and Secondary (2005–2024)

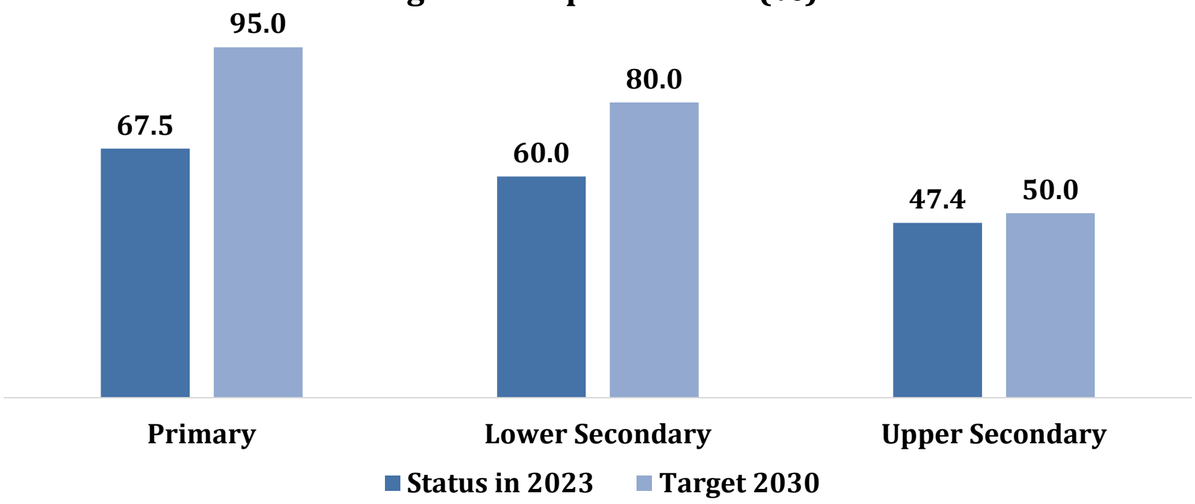


Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022;2024

Counter Narrative 1: "Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children."

- **Boys' primary enrolment spiral:** Boys' primary NER fell 7 percentage points in a single year, from 98% (2023) to 91% (2024) — *the steepest single-year reversal on record*
- Important to note: part of this 2024 drop reflects improved data systems removing duplicate entries and age misreporting. This means some of the apparent fall reflects better counting, but also means previous enrolment figures were inflated, and the **underlying problem may be older than the data suggests**
- **Boys' secondary enrolment gap widened:** The **gap between boys and girls** at the secondary level **grew from 11 percentage points to 16 percentage points**

Figure: Completion rate (%)



- **Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in progressing towards achieving *SDG 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*.**
- **In fact, for upper secondary, the target has been kept to only halfway to the goal of achieving SDGs.**

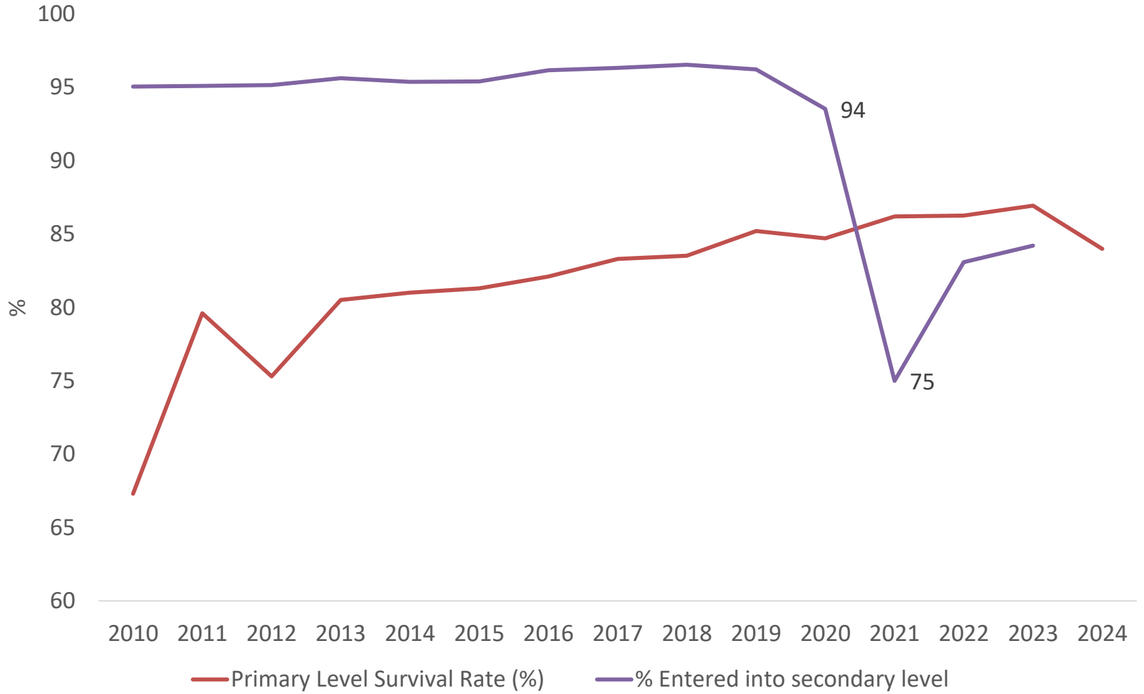
Counter Narrative 1: "Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children."

The primary-to-secondary cliff:

- In 2010, 95% of children who completed primary school transitioned to secondary school, an improving rate. By 2024, that figure fell to 84.2%, revealing a reversal of the trend
- However, **BANBEIS data shows that the Grade 5 to Grade 6 transition rate peaked at 96.5% in 2019, then collapsed to 74.99% in 2022** (meaning roughly one in four students finishing primary did not continue on), before partially recovering to 83.1% in 2023
- Many students (particularly boys) may have moved to child labour – according to MICS child labour increased from 6.8% in 2019 to 9.2% in 2025

The official narrative documents children leaving school within the primary cycle, but is largely silent on the population that completes the primary cycle and still does not enter secondary

Figure: Primary Survival and Transition to Secondary (2010–2024)



Source: Authors' Compilation from Bangladesh Education Statistics

Counter Narrative 1: “Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children.”

The 2021 statistical anomaly (boys' dropout):

- Boys' apparent improvement is nearly twice as large as girls' — *yet 2021 is the year schools were physically closed*
- To note: in 2021, the government applied blanket auto-promotion due to COVID-19, carrying forward boys who would otherwise have dropped out or repeated, registering a statistical improvement that did not reflect genuine re-engagement
- The ASPR 2022-2023 explicitly notes that the 2021 repetition anomaly "may not represent genuine academic progress but rather a specific effect of the pandemic disruption.“
- **Once schools effectively reopened, boys’ dropout rate increased back to the pre-2020 level**
- **Percentage of women aged 15-19 years who are married increased from 34.3% in 2013 to 38.9% in 2025**

Figure: Primary Cycle Dropout Rate (2010–2024)

Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022, 2024

Counter Narrative 1: “Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children.”

The 2024 boys' dropout reversal — structural signal, not COVID echo:

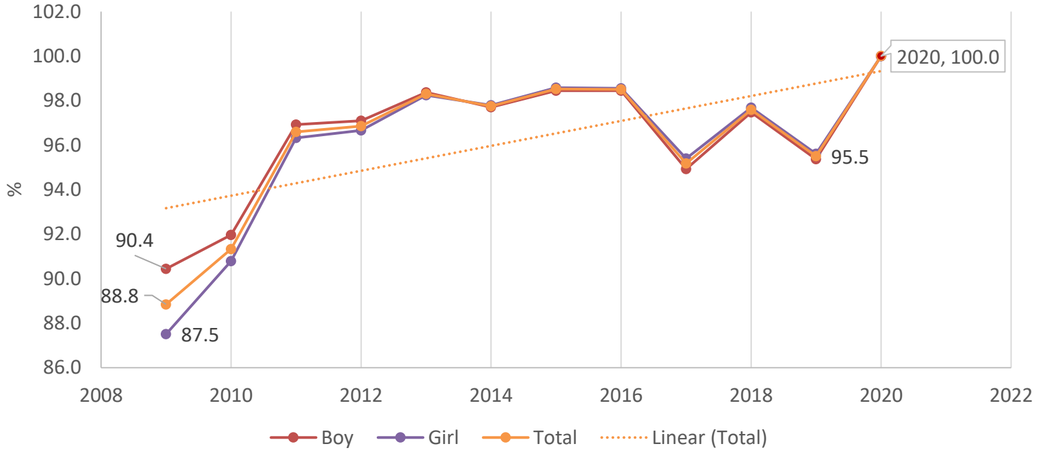
- Boys' primary cycle dropout rate rose from 14% (2023) to 19% (2024) — returning to the pre-COVID 2019 level
- This is not a recovery from COVID disruption; it is a return to a pre-existing structural problem that the pandemic temporarily masked
- Three possible interpretations:
  - **Labour market pull:** Post-COVID household income pressure may be pushing boys into work earlier than before, particularly in households where income has not recovered
  - **Stipend inadequacy:** The primary education stipend (BDT 100–125 per month) is losing its steam, as in terms of purchasing power, it gradually lost value amid high inflation. It may be insufficient to retain boys whose opportunity cost of staying in school — measured in foregone daily wages or household labour contribution — is rising faster than girls' opportunity cost
  - **Auto-promotion effect:** The boys who were administratively carried through the system in 2021 and 2022 reached the end of the primary cycle without the foundational skills or formal credentials that would make secondary school viable, and are now exiting the system for better earning opportunities
- Underlying all three interpretations is a structural observation: Student retention is not driven by quality of education but rather when it is the best available option to students. They leave when it is not.

Official Narrative 2: "The education system maintained learning outcomes through an unprecedented disruption — 18 months of school closure due to COVID-19."

- NSA 2022 headline finding: **"Learning levels in 2022 are at par or show a slight increase compared to NSA 2017"**
- The share of students achieving grade-level competencies improved between 2017 and 2022
- PECE (Primary Education Completion Examination) pass rates remained above 95% throughout the entire period
- The system delivered continuity through TV-based and digital remote learning during closures
- Formal completion was maintained even during the longest disruptive period in the system's history

COVID-19 tested the system. The system held. Children are learning at least as well as before.

Figure: PECE Pass Rate (% of Students Passed Among Those Appeared) (2009–2020)



Source: APSC 2021

Figure: % of students achieving grade level competencies in Bangla and Math (2017-2022))

Subject	Group	Grade 3		Grade 5	
		2017	2022	2017	2022
Bangla	Girls	48%	55%	44%	52%
	Boys	45%	47%	43%	47%
	All	**47%**	**51%**	**44%**	**50%**
Maths	Girls	33%	40%	34%	31%
	Boys	35%	38%	32%	29%
	All	**34%**	**39%**	**32%**	**30%**

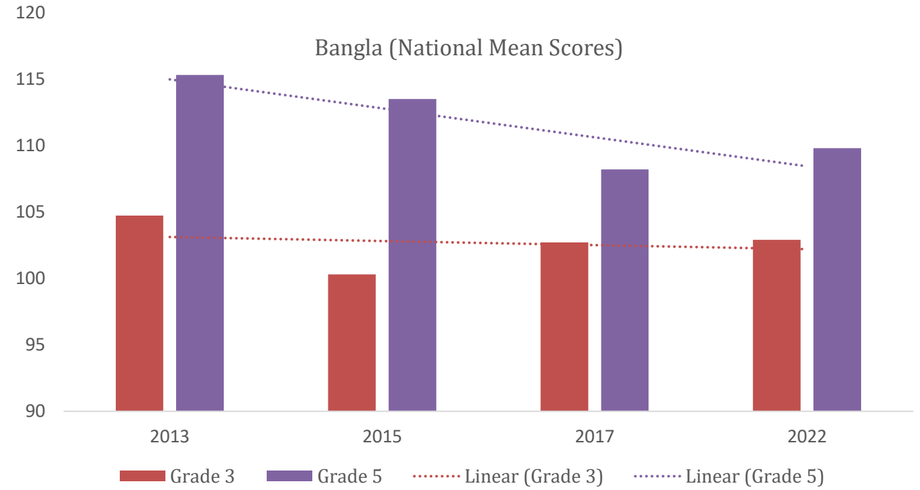
Source: National Student Assessment 2022

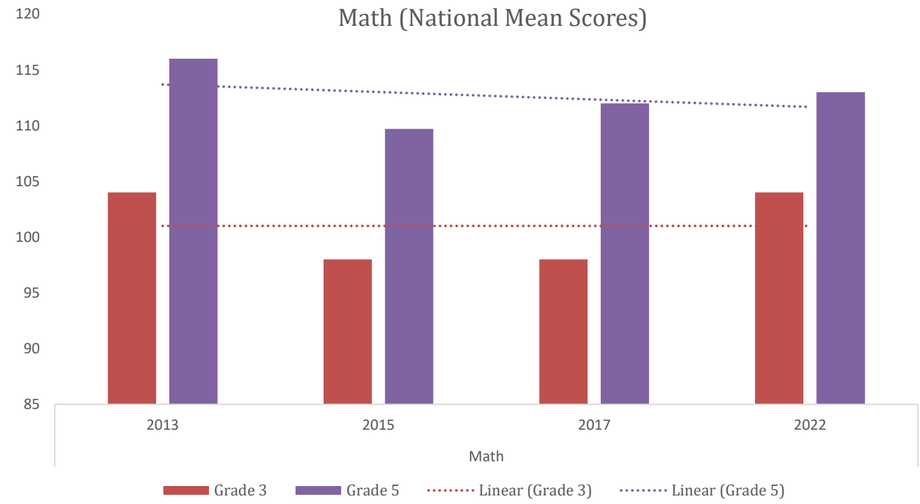
Counter Narrative 2: "Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."

The official narrative did not mention that the share of students attaining Grade 5 math skills, for both boys and girls, decreased from 2017 to 2022

Also, "2017" is a faulty benchmark:

- The NSA 2022 report itself acknowledges, in its own findings, that "mean scale scores seem to be similar to 2013 levels for Grade 3, and similar to NSA 2017 level for Grade 5"
- A drop in mean scores occurred between 2013 and 2015, during active PEDP3 implementation
- After a decline from 2013 to 2015, mean scale scores in Bangla and Mathematics (Grades 3 and 5) showed a gradual recovery through to 2022. **However, no score in 2022 has returned to its 2013 level**
- It is to be noted that NSA does not necessarily match the global education standard, such as PISA but our students will often compete at the international level in an increasingly globalised world





Source: National Student Assessment 2022

Counter Narrative 2: "Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."

- In Grade 3 Math, Mymensingh jumped from **101.1 in 2017** to **111.1 in 2022**, the highest in the country (NSA, 2022)
- **Sylhet** remains the most disadvantaged division, **consistently performing below the national mean** in every cycle.
- **Dhaka and Mymensingh** are the only divisions that **consistently perform above the national ave**rage across all subjects and grades
- NSA (2022) reports that disaggregated data reveal that students in **wetlands (Haor), remote areas, and islands** consistently perform the lowest.
- It is to be noted that **all of the 2022 mean scores**, except for Grade 3 Math, **have not reached their 2013 levels**
  - Grade 3 math mean score in 2022 is on the same level as it was in 2013.

Bangla and Math mean scale scores by division (Grade 3)

	Bangla				Math			
Division	**2013**	**2015**	**2017**	**2022**	**2013**	**2015**	**2017**	**2022**
Barisal	109	99.6	105	101	106.4	96.8	103.4	102.5
Chittagong	106	100	101	102	105.5	97.8	96.8	103.1
Dhaka	102	102	104	106	100.9	98.9	98.5	105.6
Khulna	104	101	102	101	102.7	98.8	97.3	100.7
Mymensingh			103	109			101.1	111.1
Rajshahi	107	104	104	102	107.9	101.3	99.3	103.2
Rangpur	106	101	105	103	105.9	99.7	101.6	104.7
Sylhet	101	94.7	97.6	98.4	98.4	92.4	93.5	99.8
National Mean	**105**	**100**	**103**	**103**	**104**	**98**	**98**	**104**

Bangla and Math mean scale scores by division (Grade 5)

	Bangla				Math			
Division	**2013**	**2015**	**2017**	**2022**	**2013**	**2015**	**2017**	**2022**
Barisal	118.2	112.6	108.4	108.2	119.6	108.9	114.4	110.3
Chittagong	115.3	112.2	108	109.9	117.2	109.5	110.3	113.4
Dhaka	114.7	116.1	110	112.6	114.4	111.6	112.5	115.4
Khulna	113.9	115.9	108	109.0	115.5	110.8	110.8	111.4
Mymensingh			109	114.3			112.4	119.4
Rajshahi	117.6	118	110	109.0	118.3	111.9	112.9	112.5
Rangpur	116.4	112.5	110	111.2	115.4	110.5	112.5	112.7
Sylhet	111.2	107.3	103	104.5	111.0	104.4	107.2	108.1
National Mean	**115**	**114**	**108**	**110**	**116**	**110**	**112**	**113**

Source: National Student Assessment 2022

Counter Narrative 2: "Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."

The official NSA 2022 numbers report a decline in the (already comparatively low) share of students achieving grade 5 math competencies between 2017 and 2022.

But there is a contradiction: the **mean scale score** for Grade 5 math rose slightly (112 → 113) between 2017 and 2022, while the **proportion achieving grade-level competency fell** (32% → 30%)

- The cut score for "grade-level competency" sits at Band 4, which starts at scale score 113. *The national mean in 2022 is exactly 113,* **which means the bulk of the student population is "nearly" meeting basic grade-level competencies.**
- Students assessed in 2022 **spent Grades 3–4 during the 18-month school closure**, **losing critical foundational learning time.**
- The NSA 2022 notes that **lower-performing students were more likely to drop out during this time, yet competency rates still declined**, possibly compounded by **auto-promotion.**
- Many students are reaching Grade 5 without the foundational skills needed to achieve Band 4 competencies.

However, the decline did not begin in 2022 as Grade 5 math competency rates have been falling since 2013, with the 2017–2022 drop continuing an existing trend rather than reflecting only a pandemic shock.

Counter Narrative 2: "Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."

The Resulting Labour Market Disconnect

- As Bangladesh moves towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the **demand for skilled, adaptive workers is outpacing what the education system delivers**. Ultimately, creating a widening **skills gap** that leaves graduates unprepared for the evolving labour market (ESA, 2020).
- There is a well-known unemployment paradox in Bangladesh: **unemployment rises with education level,** with tertiary graduates facing a 13.5% unemployment rate vis-à-vis 2% for primary-educated workers. Moreover, **employers are increasingly discounting formal certificates as unreliable signals of competence**, relying instead on informal screening and networks (LFS, 2024)
- Employers demand **critical thinking, ethics, leadership, and teamwork**, yet conventional pedagogical approaches and curricula leave little room for collaborative, project-based learning that builds these capacities. Thus**, making soft skills an unmet priority** across university and TVET levels (ESA, 2020)
- This crisis cuts across both ends: **workers with primary education or below** (roughly 46% of the workforce) **lack the literacy to upskill**, while **graduates from madrasahs and rural institutions face additional barriers** due to outdated curricula and insufficient digital and communication skills for the formal job market (White Paper, 2024)
- Currently, the education system is one that **over-certifies and under-prepares** its students, producing credentials that neither reflect competence nor translate into productive employment for them (ESA, 2020)

Official Narrative 3: “The education system is well-governed through results-based management and functional decentralisation."

- **Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp):** Adopted since 1997; institutionalises donor coordination, reduces transaction costs, and aligns all education projects under the National Education Policy 2010
- **Decentralised planning:** School Level Improvement Plans (SLIPs) and Upazila Primary Education Plans (UPEPs) push planning and resource decisions down to school and sub-district level
- **Community governance:** School Management Committees (SMCs) provide community oversight and parental engagement at every government primary school
- **Results-Based Management (RBM):** PEDP4 operates through a formal results chain linking budget inputs to specific Key Performance Indicators for learning
- **Data systems:** The Annual Primary School Census (APSC/APSS), National Student Assessment (NSA), and BANBEIS constitute one of the most data-rich education management systems in South Asia
- **What is also acknowledged :** School education is split between the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) — a division described in ESA 2020 as found "nowhere else in the world" — which affects curriculum continuity and coherent strategy across the full school cycle

Counter Narrative 3: “There is a fundamental disconnect between a complex administrative data system and the reality within classrooms”

- **National Student Assessment (NSA) was initiated in 2006** with a clearly stated mandate: "a key purpose of the NSA is to provide accurate and timely data-driven information to support policy and planning, enhance teacher education programs, and improve classroom instruction to increase student learning“
  - This **mandate appears word-for-word, unchanged, in the NSA reports of 2015, 2020, and 2022**
  - Schools and district officials routinely treat NSA as a "low-stakes research exercise" that is disconnected from teaching decisions, resource allocation, and student promotion — confirmed by NSA 2022's own design phase documentation and by ASPR 2020
  - **This is because there is no clear connection established between the NSA and decisions at policy and operational levels**
- The PEDP4 annual budget tables (FY2018–19 through FY2022–23) reveal a consistent five-year pattern.
  - The sub-components that fail to execute are precisely those most directly linked to instructional quality, such as **Teacher Recruitment and Deployment, ICT in Education, Continuous Professional Development, and Data Systems for Decision Making**
  - Sub-components that are reliably executed every year: Infrastructure; Maintenance; WASH

There is apparently no incentive to improve the education system or its quality.

Counter Narrative 3: "There is a fundamental disconnect between a complex administrative data system and the reality within classrooms"

- **The Decentralisation Gap**
- As of 2016: 28% of District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) posts were vacant; 32% of Assistant DPEO posts were vacant; 57% of upazila resource centre instructor posts were vacant; 27% of Head Teacher posts were vacant
- SMC member training was de-prioritised in 2011 and has had no separate budget allocation since, as a result, there is little to no meaningful oversight
- UPEPs: only 50% of upazilas received funding even to prepare the plan; none received resources for implementation

The governance paradox is that Bangladesh has built regional leading data infrastructures (NSA, APSS, BANBEIS), yet ***none of these effectively drive classroom practice***

Official Narrative 4: “The Education System is publicly financed and accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status.”

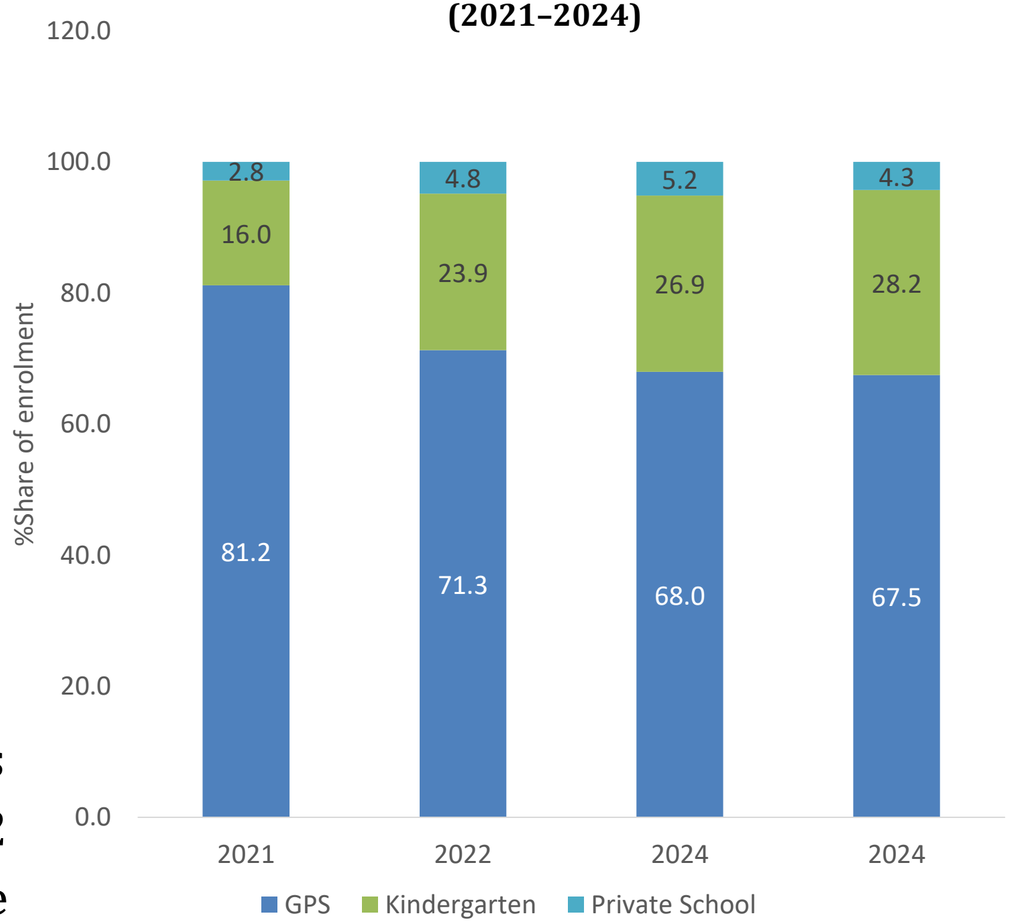
Bangladesh has built one of the most comprehensive public finance architectures for basic education in the developing world, removing cost as a barrier to schooling.

1. Primary education is entirely tuition-free in government primary schools
2. Over 350 million free textbooks are being distributed annually, since 2009, to more than 40 million students, reaching every enrolled child at the start of the year
3. The Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP), universalised in 2016, reaches 16.3 million students with direct cash transfers
4. The Female Secondary Stipend Programme reversed the gender gap in secondary enrolment
5. School feeding covers 3 million+ students in poverty-prone upazilas
6. The ROSC programme reaches 750,000 out-of-school children through Ananda Schools
7. The government is extending free and compulsory education through Grade 8

Counter Narrative 4: "The education system is free to enter but expensive to sustain in."

- Between FY 2015–16 and FY 2019–20, households provided more than 50% of total national education spending
- Average primary education costs increased by 25% (BDT 1,165 per month in 2022→ 1,441) while secondary costs by 51% (BDT 2,278 per month in 2022 → 3,452) within six months in 2023, with higher rise in urban areas (Education Watch, 2023)
- In recent years, the share of students enrolled in government primary schools has declined sharply (Figure), while the share of entrants to kindergartens and private schools expanded
- The previous statistics do not include students of Qawmi Madrasahs, which are reportedly growing
- BEFAQ, the largest of six boards under which Qawmi madrasahs operate, reportedly saw examinees surge by 55% between 2022 and 2025 to 349,776 students, with significant growth in female participation

Figure: Distribution of Primary Enrolment by School Type (2021–2024)



Source: Author's Compilation from APSC '21; APSC '22; APSC '23; APSS '24

Counter Narrative 4: “The education system is free to enter but expensive to sustain in.”

Why free textbooks do not solve the cost problem:

- According to students**, 92% of primary students and 93% of secondary students depended on commercial guidebooks** (Education Watch, 2023).
- Almost **three-quarters of students**, totaling 73.3% at both primary and secondary levels, **engage private tutors** (Education Watch, 2023).
- Only 43.7% of secondary teachers write their own examination questions; 36.8% purchase questions from teachers' associations, and 14.4% purchase them from guidebook publishers (Education Watch 2018–19).
- This creates a closed loop: the same actors who design or select examination content also profit from selling the preparation materials aligned to that content.
- Free textbooks do not substitute for guidebooks in this environment because guidebooks are aligned to actual test content, not to the official curriculum.
- Removing tuition fees while leaving this structure intact removes the smallest cost component of schooling. **The dominant cost is the private tutoring and guidebook market that the examination system makes functionally compulsory.**

Official Narrative 5: “Bangladesh's schools are infrastructurally ready for the future.”

Under SDG 4.a.1, seven components are classified as ‘basic infrastructure utilities’ in schools: electricity, internet access, computers for pedagogical reasons, infrastructure adapted for students with disabilities, basic drinking water, single-sex basic sanitation facilities and basic handwashing facilities.

- **Electricity access** in primary schools rose from 87.6% in 2020 to 96.4% in 2024; secondary schools achieved a total transformation from 77% in 2012 to 98.9% in 2024
- Safe drinking water access in secondary schools climbed steadily from 94.5% in 2012 to 98.1% in 2024; at the primary level, access rose from 86.4% in 2020 to 98.4% in 2024.
- Digital access in secondary schools expanded significantly: internet connectivity rose from 45.7% in 2012 to 81% in 2024, and computer access grew from 70.3% in 2012 to 87.9% in 2024.
- The government acknowledges that primary school computer and internet access declined — to 77.5% and 70.9% respectively, in 2024 — from 89.9% and 79.89% in 2020, framing this as a transition toward **more accurate, validated reporting** through the IPEMIS system

Counter Narrative 5: “The education infrastructure may not be ready for the future.”

- Digital infrastructure is structurally fragile: computer and internet access declined sharply across primary and Madrasah in 2024 and have plateaued below 90% in secondary (BES, 2024)
- Teacher quality has flatlined or collapsed: secondary school-trained teacher rates are lower in 2024 (66.1%) than in 2012 (72.7%); Madrasah-trained teacher rates fell from 27.69% to 9.19% between 2023 and 2024, already a shrinking base of qualified teachers (BES, 2024)
- Actual pedagogical use of ICT in primary schools is as low as 1.5% and 11% in secondary schools (Education Watch, 2023)
- Equity infrastructure is failing its most vulnerable: Disability infrastructure remains a "ramp-only" approach, with less than half of primary schools (48.9% in 2024) accessible. Moreover, girls' sanitation facilities are declining across all levels — the system cannot be future-ready for all if it is retreating on the basics (Education Watch, 2023)

Official Narrative 6: “Education is framed as a national priority, but fiscal preference across three successive five-year plans reveals deteriorating ambition in terms of public allocation.”

- UNESCO global recommendation: 4–6% of GDP
- **6th FYP (2011–2015): “Public budget allocation has to increase substantially for expansion and quality improvements in education… to 4 per cent of GDP…by 2015”.**
- **7th FYP (2016–2020): “The topmost policy priority is to raise the share of public spending on education to at least 3.0 of GDP”**
- **8th FYP (2021–2025): “Budgetary allocations to the education sector will be increased to create better human capital…the education budget will grow from 2.0% of GDP in FY2019 to 3.0% of GDP by FY2025.”**
- **Perspective Plan :**
  - **2031 target :** 3.5% of GDP
  - **2041 target :** 4.0% of GDP

- It is evident that over the last three successive Five-Year Plans, ambition levels as regards budget allocation for education has come down: the original target for 2015 (4.0%) became the 2041 target

Counter Narrative 6: "Despite repeated official claims that education receives the 'highest priority,' education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years"

Figure: Education allocation as % of GDP (%)

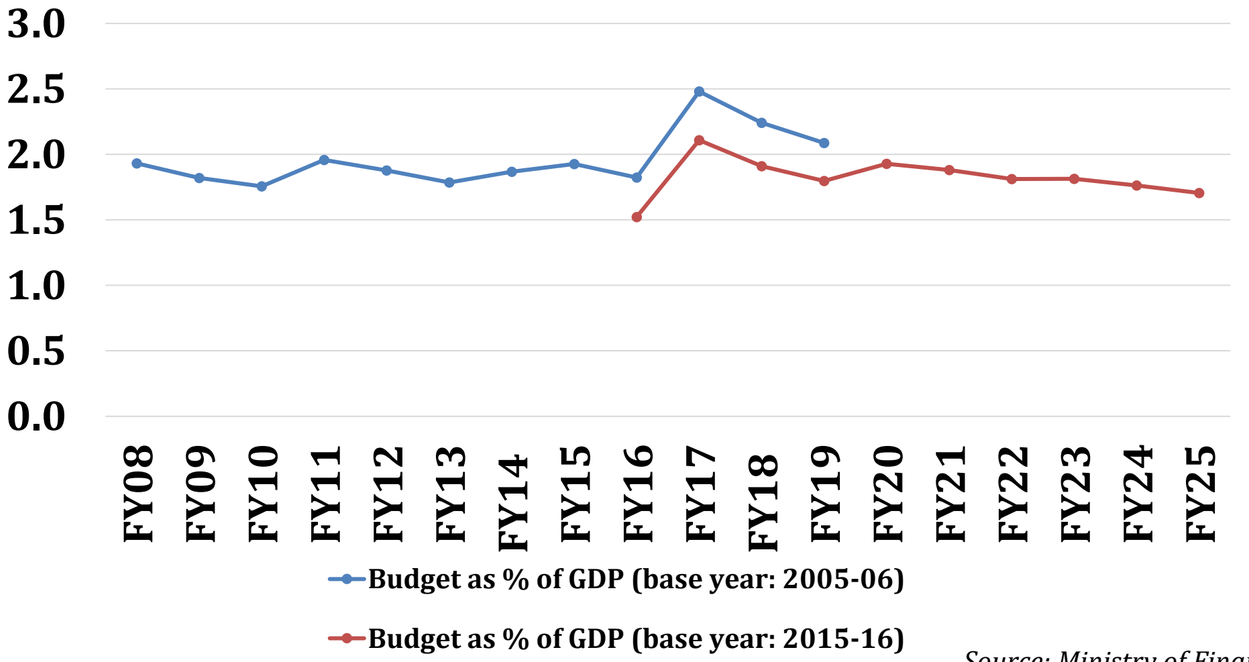
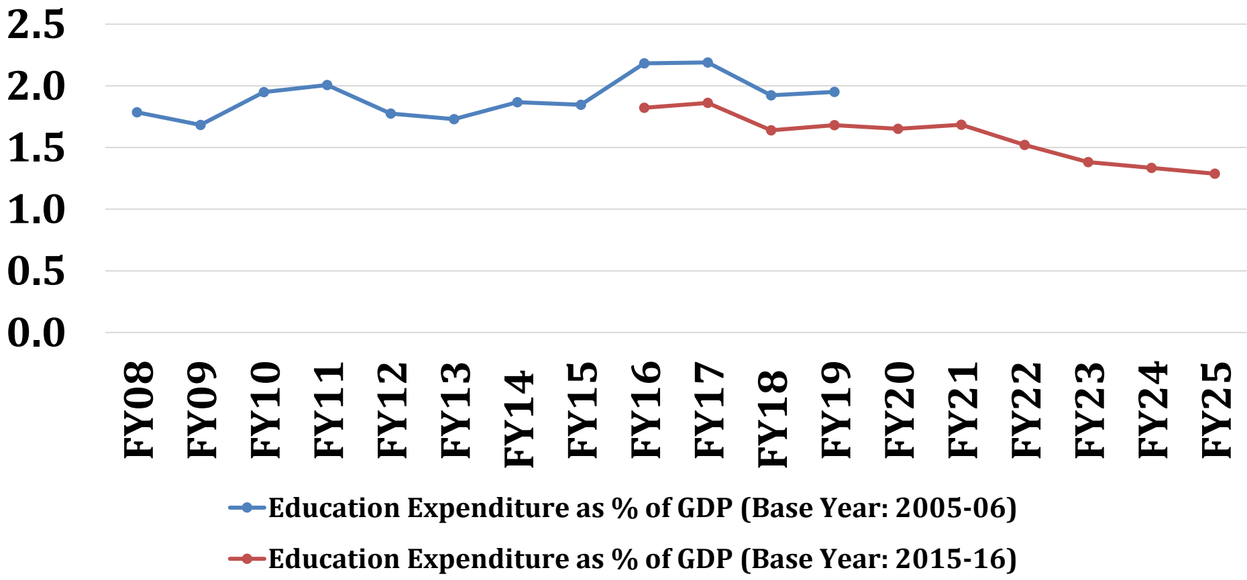


Figure: Education expenditure as % of GDP (%)



Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF)

- In **FY2025, the allocation stands at only about 1.7% of GDP, while actual utilisation falls further to 1.3%**
- Although education allocation and utilisation peaked around **FY2017**, both have shown a continuous decline in subsequent years

Counter Narrative 6: "Despite repeated official claims that education receives the 'highest priority,' education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years"

Table: Total education budget expenditure rate (as % of allocation)

Timeline	Total execution rate (%)	Operating budget execution rate (%)	Development budget execution rate (%)
FY10-FY15	100	105	89
FY16	**120**	**133**	**90**
FY17-FY20	88	94	75
FY21-FY22	87	91	79
FY23-FY25	79	92	49

Source: Ministry of Finance (MoF)

- *Limited fiscal flexibility remain.* After COVID-19 (FY23–FY25), operating remains high at 92% while development collapses to 49%. This indicates a **structurally rigid recurrent expenditure system where development spending becomes the adjustment variable**
- The inflated education budget after FY16 was mainly driven by the implementation of the National Pay Scale 2015, which came into effect in FY16

Counter Narrative 6: “Despite repeated official claims that education receives the ‘highest priority,’ education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years”

What are the reasons?

- Limited Fiscal Resources: The tax-to-GDP ratio stood at just 6.8% in FY2025 (among the lowest in the region), and the FY2026 target of 8.3% is already expected to be missed. The revenue shortfall in FY2025 alone exceeded Tk. 1 lakh crore, and ADP spending hit an all-time low, falling by 26.2% in FY2025. There is no fiscal space to scale up education spending without a structural improvement in revenue mobilisation.
- Spending capacity is low, driven by not just political will but also institutional causes such as unfilled key posts (including those of PDs) and weak programme management
- There is little to no incentive mechanism for better performance in the current administrative system architecture

Counter Narrative 6: "Despite repeated official claims that education receives the 'highest priority,' education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years"

ADP Allocation for FY2025: Plan vs Reality

Sectors	Share of ADP in FY25 (%)	Share of ADP in FY25 as per 8FYP (%)	Allocation in ADP FY25 (Crore Tk.)	Allocation planned for ADP FY25 in 8FYP (Crore Tk.)	Difference between actual allocation vs 8FYP (Crore Tk.)
Transportation and Communication, Power and Fuel, Housing and Community Facilities, Industrial and Economic Services, Environment, Climate Change and Water Resources	60.34	36.19	153,889	133,020	20,869
Education, Health, Agriculture, Local Government and Rural Development, Science and ICT, Social Protection	**35.88**	**54.92**	**91,509**	**201,840**	**-110,331**
General Government Services, Defence, Public Order and Safety, Religion, Culture and Entertainment	3.78	8.89	9,643	32,670	-23,027

What are the reasons?

- Elite capture in education is structural. 98% of the difference between the 8FYP programmed and ADP allocations is borne by these sectors, while physical infrastructure received more than the planned allocation. The political, bureaucratic, and business elites send their children to private schools and bear no sense of urgency or need to reform the public education system.
- Democratic accountability for education outcomes is nearly absent. No effective local governance structure, no community oversight, no political cost for persistent underperformance.
- Unless education features as a political agenda, the status quo will continue!

A Snapshot of the Narratives

The "Official" Narrative	The Counternarratives
"Bangladesh achieved near-universal primary enrolment and dramatically expanded secondary access over two decades while students are staying longer in the school system"	**"Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children."**
"The education system-maintained learning outcomes through an unprecedented disruption — 18 months of school closure due to COVID-19."	**"Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."**
"The education system is well-governed through results-based management and functional decentralisation."	**"There is a fundamental disconnect between a complex administrative data system and the reality within classrooms"**
"The Education System is publicly financed and accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status."	**"The education system is free to enter but expensive to sustain in."**
"Bangladesh's schools are infrastructurally ready for the future."	**"The education infrastructure may not be ready for the future."**
"Education is framed as a national priority, but fiscal preference across three successive five-year plans reveals deteriorating ambition in terms of public allocation."	**"Despite repeated official claims that education receives the 'highest priority,' education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years"**

Aligning the Election Pledges with the Counternarratives

PART 3

The Education Pledges of the Incumbent Government: Do they address the counternarratives?

Counternarrative 1: "Bangladesh is significantly lagging behind in ensuring primary and secondary education for all children"
Related pledge(s) of BNP's election manifesto 1.Preventing dropouts in remote areas 2.Ensuring universal access to pre-primary education 3.Reducing social and geographic inequality in education 4.Ensuring safe health protection for female students

The Education Pledges of the Incumbent Government: Do they address the counternarratives?

Counternarrative 2: "Learning outcomes were declining before even before COVID-19 and are lower than in 2013 after a decade of investment, undermining labour market needs."

Related pledge(s) of BNP's election manifesto

1. Technical education for all
2. Modernising and updating Madrasa education
3. Improving education for learners with special needs
4. Creating opportunities to develop hidden talents
5. Inclusion of sports and cultural education
6. Learning with happiness
7. Mandatory third-language learning
8. Emphasis on creativity and analytical thinking
9. Talented teachers for quality education

The Education Pledges of the Incumbent Government: Do they address the counternarratives?

Counternarrative 3: "There is a fundamental disconnect between a complex administrative data system and the reality within classrooms"
Related pledge(s) of BNP's election manifesto 1.Introducing a unique digital identity (Edu-ID)

Counternarrative 4: ""The education system is free to enter but expensive to sustain in."
Related pledge(s) of BNP's election manifesto 1.Providing free school uniforms 2.Priority to health and food (hygienic toilets, mid-day meal programme)

The Education Pledges of the Incumbent Government: Do they address the counternarratives?

Counternarrative 5: “The education infrastructure may not be ready for the future.”

Related pledge(s) of BNP’s election manifesto

1.Establishment of multimedia classrooms
2.Introducing free Wi-Fi
3.One teacher, one tab
4.Dedicated education TV channel

Counternarrative 6: “Despite repeated official claims that education receives the ‘highest priority,’ education spending as a share of GDP has steadily declined over the years”

Related pledge(s) of BNP’s election manifesto

1.Allocate 5% of GDP to education

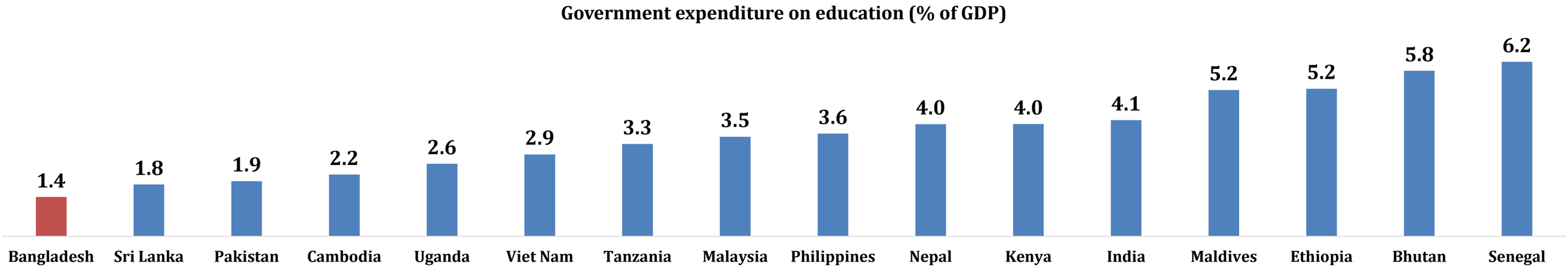
Election Pledges of Other Political Parties that may be considered

A larger number of education-related pledges in other political parties' election manifestos are broadly aligned with those of the incumbent government.

However, the incumbent government may consider the following two pledges for implementation

- Gradually move toward the **internationalisation of education quality assessment by pursuing internationally recognised evaluation systems**, e.g., participation in the OECD's PISA-D (BJI)
- **Incorporating inclusive education as a mandatory module in the teachers' training** institutes, and **establishment of the district-level resource centers** to provide technical and professional support to schools, ensuring that no child is denied access to education solely due to disability (NCP)

1. Allocate 5% of GDP to education



- **No definitive timeline has been established; however, it is anticipated that the target year will be 2031. In FY2026, the education budget allocation was again designated as 2% of GDP. The education sector also struggles with limited capacity to use its budget effectively. In FY2025, actual expenditure was 1.5% of GDP, while the allocation was 2%.**
- **Should a linear growth trajectory be pursued, an incremental allocation of 0.6 percentage points per annum will be necessary. Alternatively, an 'accelerated pathway' could start with modest allocation while improving procurement, workforce, and program management. Once operational, a faster increase may be possible, proposing the education budget for FY2027 at 2.3% of GDP, with an average annual increment of 0.7 percentage points to reach 5% by 2031.**
- **To successfully achieve this objective, three key considerations are: (i) enhancing domestic resource mobilisation for incremental costs, (ii) creating a strategy for resource allocation that aligns with health sector goals, and (iii) improving expenditure performance with a focus on quality.**

2. “A mid-day meal programme will be introduced gradually nationwide for students in marginalised and hard-to-reach areas”

About BDT 8,288 crore annually (0.13% of GDP) is required to establish the initiative as a structural, long-term budget obligation rather than a short-term development project

Countries Studied
India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Multiple policy objectives. India, Thailand, Indonesia — programmes aim to reduce classroom hunger, improve child nutrition, increase school attendance and retention, while also supporting broader goals such as agricultural production (Thailand) **Targeted coverage.** India (Nationwide) Classes I–VIII, Sri Lanka Grades 1–5, Philippines targeting malnourished children. Typically provided daily during the school year (around 100–200 school days) **Multi-level governance.** India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Philippines — programmes are coordinated by national education ministries but implemented with support from provincial/state governments, local authorities, and in some cases, development partners ➢ Exception- **India (Kerala) Managed at the individual school level** with oversight from PTAs, teachers, and community members	• **Budget shortfalls or high operational costs** (e.g., Sri Lanka funding gap, Indonesia’s expensive nationwide programme) • **Decentralised management leads to variation in meal quality and monitoring**, alongside logistical and food safety challenges such as supply chains, kitchen capacity, and incidents of food poisoning (e.g., Indonesia) • Targeted (primary students or malnourished children) approach rather than universal coverage • **Additional administrative workload for teachers** • Possibilities of **corruption and nepotism in procurement** issues (e.g., Thailand) • ***Sustainability and efficiency considerations.*** **Effectiveness will depend on strong procurement governance, inflation-adjusted budgeting, and measurable learning and attendance gains**

3. Sanitation facilities: Establishment of clean toilets

Establishing 54,162 sanitation units—including 22,183 girls' toilets, 14,213 boys' toilets, and 17,766 urinals—to meet minimum standards (1:50 girls, 1:75 boys, 1:60 urinals) across government primary and secondary schools is estimated to cost Tk. 4,875 crore

Countries Studied
India and India (Kerala)

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Initiatives are **implemented by national or state education authorities** as part of broader public health and education programmes Prioritisation in **establishing separate toilets for boys and girls, along with clean drinking water and hygiene facilities** in schools **Targeted approach.** For primary and secondary schools, with particular attention to improving conditions for girls during adolescence	• Infrastructure-focused approach led to poor maintenance, weak oversight, inadequate operational support, and failed to improve enrolment or change student behaviour • *The existing infrastructure base is substantial.* **government primary schools have 75,122 student toilet units, with 50.7% combined-use and only 24.5% designated for girls.** This indicates that the main challenge is **gender segregation and compliance with service standards** • ***Intra-divisional disparities in sanitation infrastructure-*** Govt. primary schools in **Chattogram Division account for the largest share of combined-use toilets** . Within the division, **Chattogram and Cumilla districts contain the highest concentration of such facilities** • This suggests **targeted expansion may be more appropriate than blanket construction**

4. Establishment of vending machines with menstrual supplies

*Installing vending machines in **1,295 institutions (Upgraded Govt. Primary Schools & Govt. Secondary Schools)** may require about **BDT 20** crore (without variable costs)*

Countries Studied
India (National), India (Kerala, Odisha), Sri Lanka and Nepal

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Targeted coverage. Programmes primarily target adolescent girls (India-Nationwide), particularly schoolgirls from Grades 6–12 (Odisha) **Distribution method.** • **School-based distribution model.** India (Odisha – Khushi), Kerala (She-Pad), Nepal and Sri Lanka • **Community health delivery model.** India (Menstrual Hygiene Scheme) **Multi-layered governance.** Implemented by national or state governments through education or health ministries with local government involvement (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal) **Integrated awareness.** Many programmes combine product provision with menstrual hygiene education and awareness campaigns. ➢ **India (Kerala)** is an exception with eco-friendly incinerators for disposal	• **Financial assistance may not fully address period poverty,** Programmes such as voucher systems or subsidised distribution (e.g., Sri Lanka) failed to provide sufficient support relative to actual menstrual product needs • **Operational Issues remain.** *Maintenance of vending machines, uninterrupted supply of products, and availability of proper waste disposal* systems • Some schemes focus mainly on product distribution **without fully addressing awareness, environmental sustainability, or long-term menstrual health management** options (e.g., Sri Lanka, India and Odisha) • Easily implementable; however, establishing or upgrading common rooms, ensuring privacy infrastructure, improving WASH facilities, and maintaining cleanliness could **multiply total expenditures and shift the fiscal burden toward broader facility upgrades**

5. Providing free school uniforms in all primary and secondary schools

The Free School Uniform programme represents a recurring annual expense of approximately **Tk. 3,277.76 crore (equivalent to 0.052% of GDP), based on per-student uniform costs of Tk 500–1,000 varying by education level**

Countries Studied
India, India (Kerala) and Sri Lanka

Common Implementation Pattern	Key Challenges Observed
• **Government led initiatives or donor funded.** Programmes are implemented mainly by national or state education ministries or both in India, often financed through public education budgets or national education programmes. In Sri Lanka government distribution is supported by donation of uniform cloth from the People's Republic of China • **Target coverage.** Programmes prioritise students in government or government-aided schools along with poverty-prone families **(e.g. Kerala)** • **Multiple policy objectives.** To lower out-of-pocket expenses for families, particularly for low-income households, to support enrolment and retention in public schools ➢ Exception- In **India (Kerala)**, the programme **supports the local handloom sector** and generates employment for thousands of weavers	• **Risk in financial sustainability.** Programmes rely heavily on government budgets or external support (**e.g., Sri Lanka's dependence on donated fabric**) • **Delays in procurement and distribution.** Delays in central funding under the *Samagra Shiksha* scheme in India have occasionally disrupted uniform distribution schedules • ***Secondary education claims the largest share (61.6% of total programme cost)*** • ***Targeted approach for maximum equity.*** Covering 3.2 crore students across public, private, NGO, and madrasa systems ensures broad access, **but layering in income-based targeting for lower-income households would sharpen redistributive impact and optimise resource use**

6. Introducing free Wi-Fi in schools, colleges, cafes, and libraries

One-time installation cost may require about Tk. 33 crore (Tk 5,000 as per PEDP4 **for each of 66,261 schools)**. This estimate covers only government primary (65,567) and secondary (694) schools.

Countries Studied
India, India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Maldives and Philippines

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Government-led implementation with telecom collaboration **Expansion of broadband, fibre, and Wi-Fi infrastructure.** India (BharatNet, PM-WANI), Indonesia (school internet expansion), Sri Lanka (school data packages), Maldives (nationwide school Wi-Fi) **Priority for rural or underserved schools.** India, Philippines— programmes target village schools, last-mile schools, or remote regions to reduce connectivity gaps **Integration with digital education systems.** India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia — school connectivity supports **e-learning platforms, smart classrooms, and education management systems**	• **Connectivity alone does not automatically translate into improved learning outcomes** without teacher training and digital pedagogy integration • Even where national connectivity programmes exist, actual **school-level internet access varies widely** across regions • **Digital divide remains.** Rural, remote, and island regions face significant challenges in broadband rollout and reliable connectivity • **Infrastructure and maintenance challenges.** India — the BharatNet programme faces delays due to infrastructure rollout difficulties, weak maintenance systems, and limited execution capacity in expanding rural broadband networks • While fiscally modest**, this expansion is proposed despite already high connectivity coverage in Bangladesh (≈85% in primary and 96% in secondary schools).** This raises concerns that it may **duplicate existing infrastructure rather than address remaining gaps or systemic needs.** This **requires a performance assessment of existing infrastructure**

7. Establishment of multimedia classrooms in the primary and secondary schools

Establishing **at least one multimedia classroom** in all primary and secondary schools would **require approximately Tk. 6,950 crore**

Countries Studied
India, India (Kerala), Sri Lanka, Nepal, Indonesia and Malaysia

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Government-led infrastructure programmes. India (national smart classroom initiatives), Kerala (Hi-Tech School Project), Sri Lanka —typically implemented through national or state education ministries. ➢ Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia — Some programmes often involve **technology providers, development partners, or telecom companies** to support infrastructure rollout **School-based installation of digital equipment.** India, Kerala, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia — classrooms are equipped with interactive boards, projectors, computers, and multimedia systems, etc. **Pilot projects scaling to national programmes.** Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE) initiative began by digitising high schools first and then expanding to lower primary and upper primary schools	• **Lack of trained teachers.** Multimedia equipment is often installed, but actual classroom utilisation remains limited due to a lack of insufficient teachers training in digital pedagogy **(e.g, India's *Samagra Shiksha* programme)** • **Inequal digital access.** Rural and remote areas often lack reliable internet or electricity, which limits digital classroom initiatives • **Infrastructure sustainability challenges.** Sri Lanka and Nepal — digital classroom initiatives face long-term sustainability constraints due to high infrastructure costs, bandwidth limitations, and reliance on partnerships or external support • ***Potential diminishing returns from further ICT expansion in Bangladesh.*** Although **Kurigram, Khagrachari, and Sunamganj** report over 85% ICT facility coverage, the **relatively low proportion of ICT-trained teachers highlights weaknesses in ICT adaptation and delivery capacity**

8. One Teacher, One Tab

"One Teacher, One Tab" initiative may require about Tk. 520–780 crore at the primary level and an additional Tk. 230–350 crore at the secondary level

Countries Studied
India (Uttar Pradesh), Malaysia, Philippines (Manila City), and Maldives

Common Implementation Pattern	Comments
Government-led initiatives. India (Uttar Pradesh), Malaysia, Maldives — programmes introduced by national or state governments to support digital education **School-based device distribution.** India (Uttar Pradesh), Maldives — tablets distributed often based on the number of teachers or allocated per school ➢ In Philippines (Manila), teacher devices are laptops rather than tablets **Targeted approach.** India (Uttar Pradesh), Malaysia — distribution implemented in phases or targeted groups rather than universal one-device-per-teacher coverage ➢ Maldives — near 1:1 teacher-device coverage is more manageable due to the country's **smaller teacher population** **Integration with digital education systems.** India (Uttar Pradesh)/ Malaysia— tablets linked to platforms, e.g., **DIKSHA/Tutor Guru** for attendance, reporting, and access to digital learning materials	**Incomplete coverage.** In India (Uttar Pradesh) and Malaysia, **device distribution does not guarantee device access for all teachers** ➢ In **Malaysia,** the programme appears as **one-time targeted small-scale national distributions** rather than a sustained policy **Limited ICT training.** India (Uttar Pradesh), Malaysia, Maldives — teacher device initiatives emphasise hardware distribution, while capacity-building for teachers remains limited **Procurement challenges remain.** The Philippine Commission on Audit (COA) reported that the Department of Education (DepEd) purchased "pricey and outdated" laptops for teachers in 2021 **Without adequate teacher training, digital content integration, and monitoring mechanisms, there is a high risk of underutilisation**

Ways Forward

PART 4

Reframing the Education Agenda

A. Revisit the **Vision for Education** in view of emerging challenges

B. Make the **Education System Future-Ready** by aligning with the skills needed in a fast-changing world

C. Consolidate past achievements through strategic delivery of existing programmes

D. Pursue a staggered approach in **delivering election pledges** backed by clear allocative priorities and earmarked resources

E. Rethink governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, coordination and system effectiveness

A. Revisit the Vision for Education in view of emerging challenges

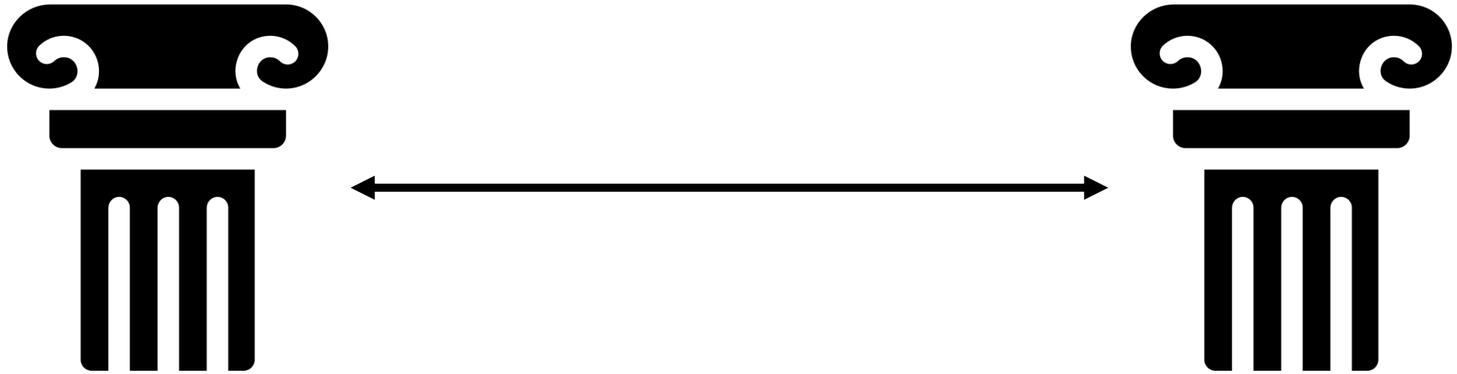
A ‘new vision’ should be adopted, based on ensuring **equitable quality education for all**

The objectives underpinning this new vision should hinge on

1. Promoting **employable skills** that prepare students for an evolving labour market
2. Developing a **child as a human** through developing interpersonal skills, empathy, tolerance, ethics, and emotional intelligence
3. Strengthening **life skills** development, including citizenship, to help navigate and survive in a fast-changing world
4. Building **strong cognitive foundations** to support lifelong learning and adaptability

B. Make the Education System Future-Ready by aligning with the skills needed in a fast-changing world

A future-ready education system has to be built on two pillars.



A foundation to learn from (Cognitive Learning)

A base of literacy, numeracy, civic understanding, and critical thinking skills,

The capacity to learn (Social Emotional Learning)

Self-awareness about strengths and limitations, self-discipline, curiosity, empathy, respect for social norms, relationship skills, and applying moral and ethical standards, problem-solving

Critical thinking and the ability to learn will be essential in shaping the future of education

With technology opening doors to learning from diverse, non-formal sources, the emphasis in the job market will shift toward skills over certificates

B. Make the Education System Future-Ready by aligning with the skills needed in a fast-changing world

- **Emphasis on SEL & CL is not new to Bangladesh**
- **In fact, it has been attempted many times in the past. Key attempts include:**

2004-05

Life Skills-based education (LSBE) was incorporated at the secondary level. However, there is no published evaluation of whether the 2004–05 LSBE package was meaningfully implemented at the classroom level.

2012

The 2012 National Curriculum introduced the ***srijonshil*** (creative) form of questioning in exams to discourage rote learning.

2021-22

The 2021/2022 National Curriculum Framework highlighted SEL at the primary level and critical thinking at the secondary level. This kicked off in 2023 but was scrapped in 2025

Overcoming socio-political inertia is also a major hurdle to reaching this goal.

B. Make the Education System Future-Ready by aligning with the skills needed in a fast-changing world

Cognitive learning and SEL may not be new to Bangladesh, but curricular reform alone will not be enough. Reforming education accordingly faced challenges in the past:

1. **Teachers are ill-equipped to handle the pedagogical demands of SEL**, but training alone will not remedy this. The **school environment itself needs to be conducive** in terms of hardware (materials, physical space, tools) and software (a school culture that supports and reinforces new pedagogical approaches, or a head teacher capable of cascading training to peers)
2. **Effective SEL delivery requires enough teacher-student contact time.** According to the PEDP4 joint review, the teacher-student ratio can be as high as 1:60 to 1:80 in public primary schools, and required contact time is not often possible. Indeed, about 80% government primary schools (in 2024) are still run on double-shifts.
3. **Education reforms take at least a decade to produce visible outcomes, but political incentives stay within the confines of the much shorter electoral cycle**. There needs to be political will to drive patience regarding education reform.

C. Consolidate past achievements through strategic delivery of existing programmes

Bangladesh cannot afford to see any deceleration of past achievements – both in terms of actions and outcomes!

D. Pursue a staggered approach in delivering election pledges backed by clear allocative priorities and earmarked resources

- ***Delivering election pledges is a marathon, not a sprint!***
- **The newly elected government has already rolled out the implementation of its election pledges**
- **A 12-point priority agenda has also been released**
- **It is pertinent for the government to identify three categories of actions:**
  - ✓ **Immediate:** The government can take initiative without delay
  - ✓ **Short:** Going programmatic approach, including embedding this in sector programmes and projects (e.g., PEDP, SEDP, etc.)
  - ✓ **Medium:** Actions to be taken following the establishment of the "*Education Reform Commission" and* subsequently to be included in the 9FYP
- Some pledges will need to be more precisely articulated to design an actionable strategy (e.g., Preventing dropouts in remote areas)
- Fiscal implications need to be estimated with the identification of financing sources, along with improved domestic resource mobilisation
- **Needs to show a strong commitment to overcome the 'elite capture' barrier!**

E. Rethink governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, coordination and system effectiveness

Incentive Structure

- To be honest, Bangladesh's public education system has a **weak incentive structure** (neither reward nor punishment), both at the individual level (e.g., teacher) or institutional level (e.g., school)
- The same is true for the **project or programme level – apparently, no action is taken in view of the inability to implement development projects/programmes**
- **Often, the transfers of Project Directors is cited as one of the constraints in implementing public projects**
- Restructuring incentives to link **recognition and resources to a result-based (e.g., learning outcomes) incentive system** will be essential

E. Rethink governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, coordination and system effectiveness

Institutional Structure

- Development goals are set anchoring the government agencies, not the education eco-system as a whole per se
- Fragmented oversight across ministries creates a challenge: Ebtdayee under MoE, general primary under MoPME; education for children with disabilities under MoSW
- Lack of cross-agency coordination is a barrier often flagged for incoherent policy delivery
- Several studies found that the head-teacher at a school can play the most significant role in achieving better outcomes, but may have limited decision-making or resources
- Currently, Bangladesh's education system is highly centralised, in areas such as teacher recruitment, deployment, and promotion, budgeting and procurement, and curriculum and assessment decisions while the schools have minimal decision-making authority

E. Rethink governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, coordination and system effectiveness

Institutional Structure

- It may be time to consider selectively and cautiously decentralising education governance
- Cross-country experience (e.g., Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam) suggests that partial, well-sequenced decentralisation, focused on school-level autonomy and local problem-solving, can improve responsiveness and efficiency.
- It may also be recognised that weak accountability, uneven capacity, and unclear division of roles can undermine equity and service delivery if decentralisation is rushed or politically influenced
- In the potential decentralisation path, the central authority would set the standards and curriculum, preventing fragmentation, provide funds and oversight, and hold the schools accountable for learning outcomes and having a strong vertical accountability. The local authorities may have a more hands-on role in ensuring effective management.
- Schools may have some authority to mobilise resources and incentivise the teachers accordingly. Bangladesh could consider decentralisation in school-level planning, mobilising additional resources, and incentivising, and, school leadership accountability for learning outcomes

E. Rethink governance arrangements to strengthen accountability, coordination, and system effectiveness

Accountability Structure

- Accountability structure has been administration-driven, which has followed an output-based checklist resulting in outcome-based outcomes
- There is a need to shift toward outcome-based accountability with stronger school-level monitoring and oversight
- Depoliticisation of SMCs is a key prerequisite
- Independent citizen-led monitoring and oversight at the school level have been largely ineffective
- Parliamentary oversight has remained absent
- Accountability nexus needs to be broadened, involving a larger set of stakeholders, including the private sector, local CSOs, and media, as they should play a role as pressure groups
- For example, the private sector should emphasise to the government that education is as important for them as physical infrastructure

Parting thoughts

- **The ‘day of reckoning’ for Bangladesh is knocking at the door, ready to unveil the consequences of neglecting education!**
- **The ‘democratic window of opportunity’ is elapsing while the ‘future of jobs’ is fast-moving**
- The education system in Bangladesh needs a ‘transformative change’ - moving forward **from the ‘old narratives’ to become ‘future-ready’**
- For that, education truly needs to be a ‘political’ agenda

- The tenure of the Interim Government may be termed as a **“lost opportunity”** to bring transformational changes in the education system
- Education was ‘allegedly’ considered in the reform area list, but did not have a ‘commission’
- Three separate ministry-initiated committees were formed that submitted three reports with no significant steps towards reforming education as per the need

Parting thoughts

- It is encouraging to see that the newly elected government has emphasised education-related electoral pledges, indicating their initial sincerity
- The counter-narratives and recommendations presented here are shared with a view to contributing to the formulation of next steps for preparing the next education budget, education sector development programmes, and articulating the terms of reference for the proposed ‘Education Reform Commission’
- Implementation progress of the electoral pledges of the incumbent government will also be followed up through the ‘Bangladesh Reform Tracker’ created by the Citizen’s Platform

Thank You

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