

Poverty, poor quality of edn behind high HSC dropouts

Shahin Akhter  08 July, 2026, 00:47



Representational image.

The number of regular students dropped out before the Higher Secondary Certificate and equivalent examinations has jumped sharply this year, far exceeding the pattern of previous years, mainly because of poverty, early marriages and rising education costs.

Highest 54 per cent of the examinees under the technical education dropped out before the board exams that began on July 2 with the number of girl students remaining high among the dropouts under all boards.



Officials, educationists and researchers blame the surge on rising poverty, increasing education costs, early marriage of students, mostly girls, and deteriorating education quality.

As many as 543,989 students, or 36.46 per cent of the 1,491,932 regular students registered for the exams, did not fill out the required forms to sit for them, as revealed by the education minister ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon on July 2.

The dropout rate this time stood at 54 per cent in technical education, 44 per cent in madrasah education and 33 per cent in general education, the minister said, calling the scale of the problem 'far exceeding the usual pattern often due to marriages or students entering the workforce to support their families.'

The exams began this year with 12.7 lakh students sitting under 11 education boards — nine general education boards, one madrassah education board and one technical education board.

BRAC University professor emeritus Manzoor Ahmed cautioned against reading too much into a single year's numbers, saying, 'Every year dropouts happen. Even this year's statistics is not extraordinary.'

He attributed the trend broadly to the impact of Covid-19 and economic pressures, noting that the higher secondary education is not free and that the expenses — including those for private coaching — remain high.

In technical education, he pointed to persistent problems such as a shortage of teachers, poor infrastructure and an outdated curriculum as reasons students leave the system.

Md Mostafizur Rahaman, deputy director (research and advocacy) at the non-government organisation Campaign for Popular Education, agreed that dropout at the higher secondary level was not a new phenomenon, saying it was 'mainly caused by rise in early marriages and poverty rate'.

'These days a section of young men do not want to study and engage in criminal activities, like teen gangs and some become eve teasers,' he said, describing poverty as a factor also pushing many students directly into work before they finish this level of schooling.

This year's rate marks a steep jump from the previous nine years, during which dropout rates among registered regular students ranged from 19.94 per cent in 2021 to 29.86 per cent in 2023 while the figure was 21.01 per cent in 2025, 24.99 per cent in 2024, 22.91 per cent in 2022, 19.94 per cent in 2021, 25.77 per cent in 2020, 25.23 per cent in 2019, 21.89 per cent in 2018 and 20.73 per cent in 2017.

A senior Dhaka board official, speaking anonymously, said that technical and vocational institutions in rural areas severely lacked teaching and learning materials — even benches to sit on — and that many madrassah students under the Bangladesh Madrassah Education Board had in recent years switched to Qoumi madrassahs instead.

At a meeting on Sunday, education minister Ehsanul Hoque directed all boards to investigate the reasons behind the dropouts.

The Bangladesh Examination Development Unit — a specialised entity under the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka — was going to survey a couple of hundred sample educational institutions across the country, said board chairman Professor Sayed Aktaruzzaman.

The World Bank projected in its May report ‘Bangladesh Development Update: Special Focus – A Business Environment that Delivers Jobs’ that around 1.4 million more people fell into poverty in Bangladesh in 2025, pushing the poverty rate to 21.4 per cent.

The Bangladesh Education Statistics-2024, compiled by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, put the overall Grade 11–12 dropout rate at 21.51 per cent in 2023, 22.72 per cent in 2022 and 21.14 per cent in 2021 — with rates for girls specifically at 22.45 per cent, 22.6 per cent and 21.56 per cent in those same years, respectively.

The preliminary findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025 — conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with UNICEF and released in November 2025 — found the national child marriage rate stood at 56 per cent.

Among women aged 20–24, 47 per cent were married before turning the eligible age of 18 and 13 per cent before turning 15.

The survey also found that the share of adolescent girls aged 15–19 who were married off rose from 32.9 per cent in 2019 to 38.9 per cent in 2025.

Professor Aktaruzzaman identified early marriage and poverty-driven entry into the workforce as the two major reasons behind the dropouts.

According to the ‘Education Watch Study 2023 — School Education in Bangladesh: Post-Pandemic Resilience and Sustainability,’ education expenses in the first six months of 2023 rose by 25 per cent at the primary level and 51 per cent at the secondary level, driven mainly by the cost of private tutors and commercial guidebooks and notebooks.

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