

Falling education standards

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At present the greatest problem in Bangladesh at the college level is educational wastage chiefly surfacing in failures and third divisioners at the Intermediate and Degree (Pass) public examinations. It is an indicator of the deteriorating standard of education at all levels from the primary to the university. Therefore, it has emerged as a great national educational problem. The deterioration, is the greatest problem facing the colleges. This is reflected in the number of failures and the number of third divisioners at the H.S.C. and Degree (Pass) levels. Poor performances in interviews, tests/examinations either for admission or jobs is also an index of this state of things. All taken together may be considered as a colossal educational wastage.

An analysis of this should first focus on the failures for proper perspective and realization of the miserable performance of our students at the final H.S.C. and Degree (Pass) & Hons and Post-graduate examinations. In HSC Examinations the average percentage of failure in all groups is 54.35% over the period from 1981-1989. Only 3.71% were successful in the first, 21.04% in the second and 21.33% in the third division. The degree (pass) level results present a dismal situation. The average failure is 65.86%, a colossal wastage. And a great majority secures a third division which is devastatingly greater at the B.A. examination. The B.A. results of Chittagong University of 1989 are an example where 87.51% of successful candidates get the third division. What can be more grievous than this.

However, the state of things at the Honours and post-graduate levels reveals a different case. On an average over a period of six years 20.17% of students of B.A. (Hons), B.Com. (Hons) and B.Sc. (Hons) fail in the final examination. And a majority of them gets a second class. 13.34% of the post

graduate students in the three groups about seven per cent less than that in the degree (Hons) do not come out successful. Here also a large number obtains a second class. For this situation students of the colleges have greater share than the universities, there is no doubt of it. Yet the average 20.17% and 13.34% failures at the honours and post graduate levels are really regrettable and undesirable because the courses are generally taken by the selected and meritorious pupils.

It is natural now to investigate into the reasons for such wastage. I have not sought them because many factors are responsible and the share of their respective contributions is very difficult to dissect and determine. But I think my recommendations for remedy can help to understand them by implications.

However, such wastage is not only a huge wastage of resources/energy and time. It is also an instigator of moral apathy, moral transgression, a creator of frustration, indiscipline and violence which are undoubtedly rampant among our young men. Painful is the landscape project here. But more painful is our indifference and neglect. I have asked a good number of teachers and principals of colleges (both govt. and non-govt.) about the problems of their institutions. Most of them did not mention the wastage. Most of them are not even aware of its gravity and almost none seems to take proper measures against it. Most of them, however, have heard about the deteriorating standard of our education being talked of frequently and widely but are not conscious of the intimate relationship of it to educational wastage. If the per-

centage of failure from the H.S.C. to the post graduate examinations is to be brought down to zero, at least to the minimum and the failures at the degree (Hons) and post-graduate levels are regarded as unpardonable; if there is no third divisioners and if most of the intermediate students get the first division, the educational loss will be the minimum and this will be an indication of some improvement in the quality of education.

The objective can be carried out to some extent in the present circumstances of the colleges if we begin by some prompt administrative measures. The system of internal examination/text exists in the college. Pupils should not only be motivated to take them, periodical tests and examinations should be more frequent. Performance reports in the periodical tests; half yearly annual examinations are to be sent to the guardians of the students. Public examinations at the college are to be so arranged that nobody can adopt unfair means in the examination. The conduct of 1989 H.S.C. Examination brought down the percentage of pass to 24.81% while the average pass over the period is 45.64%. Undoubtedly the stringent and suitable action checked the unfair means and acted as a deterrent to lowering the standard of examination. Tutorials classes do exist, yet in many of the college, due importance is not given. Pupils do not take them seriously. Nor is the attendance to tutorial classes ensured.

It will be fine if remedial measures for the backward students can be taken by arrangement of separate classes. It is not possible,

then particular care should be given to them in tutorials of different disciplines.

Teachers are instruments for teaching, tutorials and counselling. It is unfortunate that many of them do not stay for more than two or three hours in the colleges. The teachers have to remain in the college for at least 5 hours and pass some of their time in the library. But neither they nor do the students are serious about library work. A committee with some senior members of the staff may be formed to motivate and supervise their activities particularly of the students. It's chief task would be to help them form reading habit and improve as far as possible the library facilities with the limited resources. Co-curricular activities are no less important than the library work as they are an essential part of education for all round development of the students but then they are neglected in the colleges. Due attention and care are necessary. The college authority should chalkout programmes and schedules about them and see that their observance is ensured. No one can disagree that these steps will keep the students engaged in activities much of the time, resulting in barring them from unacademic activities and in improvement of the environment of the institution.

The above suggestions are fit for immediate action with possibilities to materialize them within a short period. But they are inadequate to meet the complex problem of quality improvement and prevention of educational loss. The first long term strategy needed is the improvement of library and laboratory particularly

for colleges which offer honours and post-graduate courses. In many colleges, the conditions of library, the stock of books, journals and reading space are not at all satisfactory. The conditions of library and laboratory in colleges which offer honours and post graduate courses, are no better. BANGLADESH NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION, 1988 (page-218) reports that "everywhere there is want of library accommodation. The fund for books, journals, the number of qualified library employees or the furniture are so inadequate that one can say that library does not exist in most of the schools and colleges". When the libraries are in such a pitiable condition, when it is acknowledged by all that a spacious and well-equipped library is an essential pre-requisite for an index of quality education, concerned authorities have not focussed on it. Even though, Bangladesh Education Commission, 1974, pointed out that library development was indispensable, no provision was made for it in Second and Third Five Year Plan of the country. So it has become now imperative that some development programmes with priority given to colleges offering honours and post-graduate courses are inserted in the Fourth Five Year Plan.

Development programme is also required for the gradual removal of the existing gap between the govt. and non-govt. colleges in respect of financial support and physical facilities. Out of about 817/840 colleges, there are 630 private colleges which form the core of the H.S.C. and degree education in our country. Salaries and allowances etc. of teachers and employees and physical facilities

available in these institutions are far from being satisfactory, unless they are brought at par with those of the govt. colleges, the educational standard can not be raised and the number of failures and third divisioners cannot be minimised. The achievement of these goals will moreover, demand inservice training/refreshers course for the college teachers. One may go to the extent of saying that college teachers must received pre-service training like that of the school teachers. But I think, the strengthening and expansion of inservice training /refresher's course/summer courses for them call for priority over the establishment of a training college.

The long term measures proposed are not exhaustive. The existence of congenial educational atmosphere, expansion of inspection and academic supervision, staff development for colleges having honours and post-graduate courses, development of some govt. colleges as autonomous institutions with degree awarding status, updating of curriculum, improving assessment and evaluation system, suitable teacher-student ratio, expansion of pre-primary education and ensuring of quality education and prevention of educational loss at pre-college level are pre-requisites.

The results from the materialization of the pre-requisites are a matter of time. And it is heartening to note that measures to materialize some of them are already taken and some progress is made. Now what remains to be taken up are the suggestions made for administrative action and other long term strategy recommendations and to pursue them with vigorous and sustained efforts to achieve the cherished goals of quality education and of putting an end to the colossal educational wastage.

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