

HSC and my peace of mind

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It was early January when I first got to know about the outbreak of Covid-19 in China. Back then, very few people were anticipating a pandemic, and I wasn't one of them.

Being an HSC examinee, I focused on my preparation as I had been preparing myself for the past two years. When I was days away from appearing for my final board exam, coronavirus first broke out in Bangladesh. Having read news about lockdown in countries dealing with the outbreak, I knew what that meant for HSC candidates: more time for preparation and revision.

While the spread of the virus to Bangladesh did scare me to an extent, truth be told, I was also somewhat happy because an imminent shutdown translated to postponement of HSC and that in turn meant more time for quality revision.

The first few weeks were marked by relaxation and a break from study. I was naïve to think that this indefinitely long pseudo-lockdown would help me in preparing myself better for HSC, but in truth, it did the opposite. I started forgetting most of the material I went through in the past and lost determination to go through it again. With the progression of time, my impatience for taking the exam kept growing since there was no indication of any tentative exam

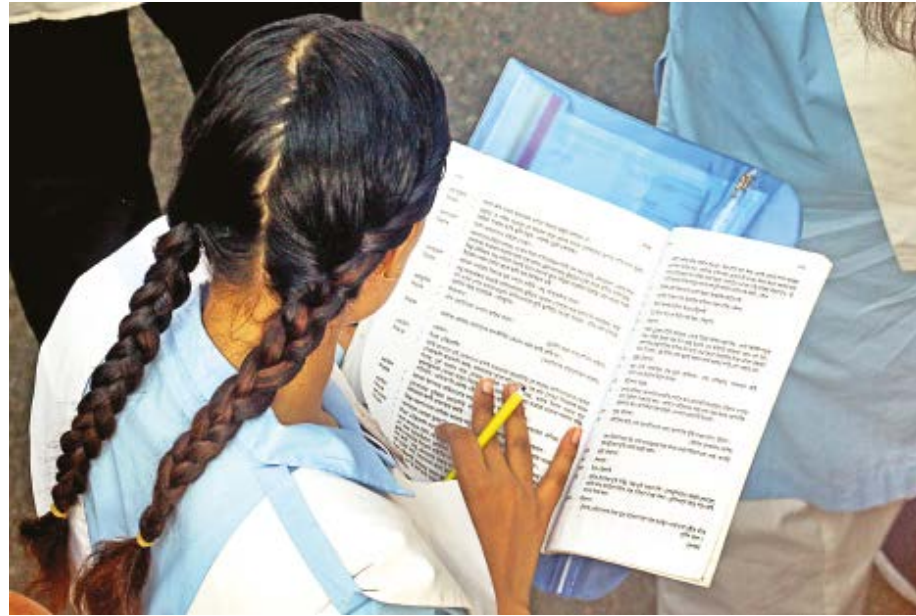


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

schedule. As no deadline was in sight, any intention of studying for HSC properly was on hold too.

Does studying even make sense if I don't know how long my memory has to retain everything? All of this paved the way for my daily dose of cumulative stress. The fear of losing friends and family was added to it as well since every now and then I would hear news of acquaintances getting affected by

or dying due to Covid-19.

Fast forward to August, I've lost the mentality to appear for HSC. Rumours of institutions reopening amidst the pandemic are circulating nowadays; they terrify me. While I want to see the end of this viral horror so that normal life can resume, I don't want a hurried resumption of normal life either as this would inevitably lead to HSC. I heavily doubt if I can still achieve the result which I

expected from myself before March. If HSC takes place at any cost, numerous students like me would fail to obtain their desired grades and marks, which would further worsen our mental health.

Furthermore, Bangladesh is still in the first wave of this pandemic whereas numerous countries have already entered the second wave. Even if the situation does improve in Bangladesh and the government decides to hold the HSC exams, this might trigger the second wave in Bangladesh and some of the exams might need to be re-scheduled again, and dates being changed mid-exam is the last thing any candidate would want. These are the reasons why I can't stress enough how I wish the authorities seriously considered predictive grades as an alternative to holding HSC (multiple countries have taken similar steps to my knowledge). That way, HSC examinees would have one fewer thing to worry about (as if worrying about university admission season weren't enough).

Only time can tell what lies ahead of HSC 2020 candidates. Perhaps predictive grades will be considered to lessen our burden, or the wait for exam dates will extend indefinitely as everyone's anxiety worsens daily.

The writer is an HSC candidate from Notre Dame College, Dhaka.

THE DISASTER OF A RESULT

BOHNNI SHIKHA

The A Level results came out last week after this year's exams were cancelled due to Covid-19. The grades were given by an algorithm looking at past performances of the students and their exam centres.

For many, grades have been ridiculously downgraded from their AS results or predicted grades. In England itself, 40 percent of the teachers' assessments were downgraded compared to the 2.2 percent upgraded results. The results have invalidated the past few years of hard work on the students' part, as these grades have severe consequences on their futures. They're now dealing with impacts of mistakes they didn't make.

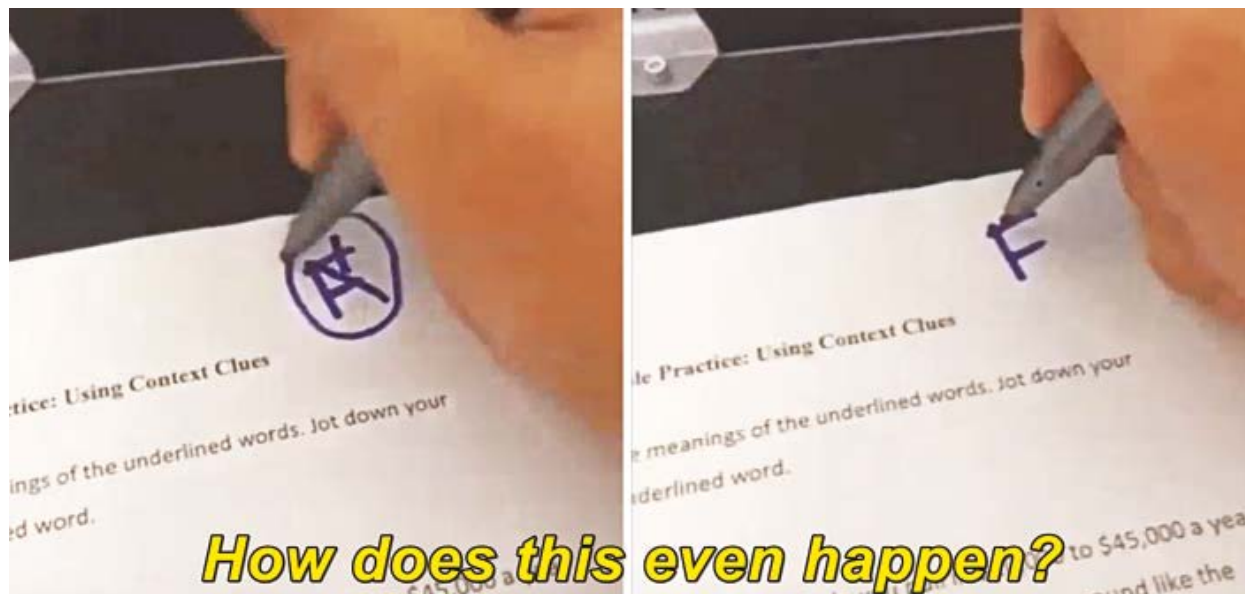
While grades dropping from A*/A to B/C has been a common sight, what left several baffled is a drastic drop to D/E.

Wasif Ahmed*, from S.F.X. Greenherald International School says, "I got an E in A Level Mathematics from a 91 percent in AS which would only happen if I got below 8 (out of 100) in my A2 exams!"

A Levels are defining points for students applying home and abroad. Ahnaf Mashrur, from Scholastica, mentions how he can't apply to most domestic universities anymore, "Given how badly I got downgraded—an A to E in Economics, B to D in Business Studies—I'm incapable of applying to public universities like IBA, DU and BUP, where I'd need at least 2 Cs to even sit for the admission exams. I can't really try for private universities either." Even those who qualify with Bs and Cs will have lower marks because of their lower overall GPA.

Students who got conditional offers or scholarships face the prospect of losing them. Students who opted for gap years can't apply according to their plans. Most universities won't accept Ds/Es for admission.

Purba Das*, from DPS STS School Dhaka, planned on applying to the UK with her AS results, but her downgraded



grades barely meet the entry requirements. "I would require an A in Mathematics for most Russell Group universities, which I was confident about getting as my mocks' average was an A grade. But because I ended up getting a B, I'm now having to look into other courses and universities."

For most students I talked to, their primary choice is going for a re-evaluation. Wasif has the SAT and IELTS lined up, and Ahnaf can't afford to lose months in his academic career. But the process is confusing with loopholes, which feels like the system has been designed to lead the students to retakes in the November session. Individuals can't appeal for their grades to be changed as the entire group would then be reviewed, and Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) won't change the

rank orders used. Most schools are overwhelmed with the students' complaints, and several teachers have confirmed that students' grades didn't match their assessments. While some authorities are reassuring their students, others have been evasive.

With the lack of proper explanation of the evaluation system by CAIE, looming university applications, and the ongoing pandemic, students face uncertainty from all directions. Retakes call for more money from middle class families who already struggled to pay the registration fees, and there's risk in taking exams in the current situation. On the other hand, there's no guarantee appeals will work.

**Names have been changed for privacy*