



In terms of literacy, students are not retaining what they learned in Class 3 after being promoted to Class 5.

# All that ails our primary education



MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

Md Shah Nawaz Khan Chandan is an assistant professor at the Institute of Education and Research, Jagannath University. Reach him at s.nawazk28@yahoo.com

The Directorate of Primary Education has recently published results of the seventh national student assessment (NSA), and it reveals a grim picture of the quality of Bangladesh's primary education. The assessment, conducted in 2022, reveals that more than 60 percent of Class 3 students and 70 percent of Class 5 students did not have the expected grade-level proficiency in mathematics. Also, 51 percent of the Class 3 students and 50 percent of the Class 5 students lacked grade-level proficiency in Bangla.

So, according to the performance standards followed for NSA 2022, most of our primary school students can only solve basic maths problems, can follow simple instructions, and acquire a minimum number of the skills prescribed in their curriculum. This also means that these students cannot work independently, cannot connect, interpret, and communicate different ideas, cannot follow systematic methodologies to solve problems, and cannot apply their knowledge to deal with new situations.

Such a bleak scenario in Bangladesh's primary education sector is nothing new, unfortunately. After introducing the NSA in 2006, with a view of measuring the achievements of primary school students in accordance with the curriculum, the government regularly administers this assessment on Class 3 and Class 5 students. The students go through written tests on two foundational subjects (Bangla and mathematics) to assess their literacy and numeracy skills.

Results of the sixth NSA were published in 2017, which was the last NSA before the Covid-19 pandemic. The NSA 2017 also revealed an equally bleak scenario. For instance, it found that around 26 percent of Class 3 students could not demonstrate the expected proficiency in Bangla, and more than 80 percent of Class 5 students failed to demonstrate expected proficiency in Bangla. Back then, more than 60 percent of Class 3 students and more than 80 percent of Class 5 students also could not display the expected proficiency in mathematics.

The NSAs indicate that, in terms of literacy, students are not retaining what they learned in Class 3 after being promoted to Class 5. They are consistently failing to achieve basic maths skills by the time of completing primary education. There might be several factors responsible for this bleak scenario, the major ones being lack of trained and skilled teachers in primary schools. In the NSA 2022 technical report, it has been stated that teachers' skills and sincerity significantly influence students' achievements.

On the other hand, if we look at the current statistics on the educational qualifications and training profiles of primary school teachers, it is easy to see why our students are failing to achieve basic competencies.

According to the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), the total number of teachers working in all types of primary level institutions is 388,917. Among them, 177,387 do not have honours degrees. A significant number of these teachers have only completed the pass course, a three-year long degree programme under National University, whose quality and acceptability has been questionable for long. Many colleges under the National University have already stopped offering this programme due to its old-fashioned curriculum and extremely low achievements.

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acceptance by employers. Besides this, more than 70,000 primary school teachers only possess a higher-secondary level of education or less.

Although several public and private universities offer specialised degrees for educators, there are only 291 primary school teachers holding these degrees. A considerable number of primary school teachers do hold postgraduate degrees, but they have not specialised in education or pedagogy.

These statistics indicate that most primary school teachers, when they start their career, do not possess the required educational qualifications or do not have any orientation or knowledge about pedagogy or the education system. As a result, the

government has to ensure that these teachers receive professional training in the 67 Primary Teachers Training Institutes (PTI) located all over the country. However, due to poor quality of the training methods and lack of participation of the teachers, such training can do little to improve the quality of primary education.

The only dedicated professional degree for primary school teachers offered by PTIs is Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd). Introduced in 2012, it's an 18-month residential course where participants, besides theoretical studies, have to practise teaching in experimental schools attached to respective PTIs and, subsequently, at their own primary schools as well. Out of 388,917 primary school teachers, only 78,298 have completed this training so far. However, teachers who have completed the DPEd often question its applicability as they do not get sufficient opportunity to practise teaching in the poorly performing experimental schools. In 2019, the government published a circular to recruit 329 permanent teachers to revitalise these experimental schools. However, they have not been able to complete the recruitment process even four years on.

This year, the DPE has already decided to discontinue the DPEd programme and launch a 10-month basic training programme, wherein primary school teachers will attend a six-month theoretical course and practice teaching for four months.

Besides, a large number of primary school teachers (at least 217,022) have completed the now-defunct one-year-long Certificate in Education (CED) course. Due to its poor curriculum and lack of applicability, this course was withdrawn and replaced by the DPEd. Now, the government's decision to further reduce the duration of the training programme to 10 months has raised concerns and protests. PTI instructors have filed a writ petition before the High Court, challenging the legitimacy of the decision. On May 7, the HC stayed the petition and gave the 10-month training programme a go-ahead.

Nevertheless, due to such bureaucratic tangles, this year, primary school teachers have not been able to attend any training programmes so far and there is no certainty as to when this will be possible. Such frequent changes and cancellations in the training modality, and the bureaucratic complexities, act as major deterrents for primary school teachers to avail training in the PTIs.

Teachers are at the heart of the primary education system and in many countries, teaching at primary schools is a highly-paid, skill-intensive and sought-after job. However, in terms of qualifications, training, and benefits, primary school teachers are some of the most neglected professionals in Bangladesh. Until the government takes pragmatic, research-driven policies to improve the quality of these teachers, there will be little hope to improve the academic performance of primary school students.

# ASIA CUP 2023

## How well will the Tigers deal with change?



Madiha Athar Khan is a technical writer and art enthusiast.

MADIHA ATHAR KHAN

Asia Cup tournaments in the last decade or so have become Bangladesh's comfort zone. Since 2012 – the first year Bangladesh ascended to the final of the tournament – there have been five editions. Bangladesh played three of those finals. However, unlike the women's team, the men have not seen nearly as much success.

Bangladesh's performance in the 2007 World Cup is cited by many as a turning point in its cricketing journey. Before then, Bangladesh had had some success – such as the win in 2005 against Australia – but they could mostly be dismissed as upsets. When the Tigers beat India in 2007, it seemed to be a sign of something big to come, but what could only be proven with time. There was something about Tamim Iqbal dancing down the wicket against the formidable bowler, Zaheer Khan, that showed a dash of daring that our players had found difficult to conjure before then. In

were supported by a rotating crop of cricketers who seemed bolstered by the force of the unit itself. There was a kind of chemistry among these core players that threaded together the playing eleven. Of late, though, many would say that this coherence in the team has been missing.

We saw Tamim Iqbal miss out on a few major tournaments, despite being the ODI captain, due to injuries. Both Mahmudullah and Mushfiqur suffered from wavering forms, which eventually saw the former not making the cut for the Asia Cup squad. It can therefore be inferred that Mahmudullah possibly will not feature in the World Cup, either. At 37 years of age, Mahmudullah Riyad's contribution to Bangladeshi cricket might have reached its conclusion. While Shakib leaves nothing to be said about his consistent performances on-field – either with the bat or the ball – one can only imagine how much better things could be if he

Thursday, Sri Lanka were missing four of their key bowlers. Yet, a dazzling performance by youngster Matheesha Pathirana outdid even our most senior batters. Pathirana, who is only 20 years old, caught the eye of MS Dhoni when the bowler's video – showing his bowling action that uncannily resembles Lasith Malinga's – went viral on social media. He has played for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL, yielding much success for his team.

On the other hand, our lone performer of the day was Nazmul Hossain Shanto, a man who has been in tremendous form for the whole year, reminiscent of Liton Kumar Das' run in 2022. Sometimes, all it takes is one great performer. But more often than not, cricket continues to be a team sport. With Tamim's injury, Liton's fever, and Riyad's exclusion, the average age and experience of the Bangladesh team suddenly seems dauntingly low.

Still, Bangladesh has a chance to make it to the Super Fours by beating Afghanistan. There seems to be a hum of anxiety in and around the team. But if this can be muted out, the strengths of the Tigers can come to the forefront of the performances. There are match winners like Mehidy Hasan Miraz, momentum shifters like Taskin Ahmed, and surprise packages like



At Thursday's match against Sri Lanka, Najmul Hassan Shanto was the only batter who managed to get going a good number of runs in the bag for Bangladesh.

PHOTO: AFP

2010, Bangladesh beat New Zealand 4-0 in a home series. In 2012, it won one nerve-racking match after another to get to the finals in the Asia Cup, only to succumb to the most heartbreaking loss our country has seen in cricket. Victories started becoming much more of a norm, especially in the homeground. Throughout this solidifying period of Bangladeshi cricket, we came to rely on four great talents – people we grew to be regarded as gifted, not merely as skilled cricketers. Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Mahmudullah Riyad found their individual places in the lineup and functioned as a tight-knit unit often led by the most magnetic leader, Mashrafe Mortaza. They

was also as unifying a leader as he is mesmerising as a player.

In Bangladesh's first Asia Cup 2023 match against Sri Lanka, hopes were high. New and young players have made their way into the squad, many of whom were a part of the U-19 World Cup winning team. Eventually, it will be these players who take Bangladeshi cricket forward. But as we go through this transitory period, where we take the best that the oldest still have to offer, empowering the future talents may inevitably be a rocky experience. Aside from the technical details that denote success and failure, a zoomed-out view provides a more traceable journey for a team.

It is worth mentioning that, on

Mustafizur Rahman. ODI cricket has been our strength; it is a format we have figured out how to excel in. A day's bad performance does not necessarily have to be indicative of how the rest of the tournament will go for the Bangladesh team.

While blind optimism is helpful to no one, the new reality must be accepted – these are our players, their calibre is defined by what they bring out on the field, and it is them who we have to back. Things will change, and perhaps in the near future, things will change even faster than at present. How much resilience the Tigers bring forward to deal with these changes will ultimately define the next stretch of Bangladeshi cricket.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Barely adequate

6 Parks of civil rights history

10 Hardly a fan

11 Last year's frosh

12 Stand

13 Gold unit

14 Take it easy

15 Diatribe

16 Conditions

17 Cobbler's tool

18 That woman

19 Quadruple

22 Coral structure

23 Punch

26 Prophesied

29 Expected

32 Tire track

33 Be a

contender

34 Overrun

36 Crooked

37 Latitude

38 River boat

39 Encrusted

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41 Ignored the limit

42 Cold forecast

DOWN

1 Zhivago's portrayer

2 Look after

3 Disputed

4 High home

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6 Stadium sound

7 Winfrey of TV

8 Parasol offering

9 Fall flower

11 Job interview topic

15 Binary base

17 Was able to buy

20 Field worker

21 Morse bit

24 Cop's words to a partner

25 Language spoken at some conventions

27 Regret

28 Hinders

29 Frisbees, e.g.

30 Open, in a way

31 Conjure up

35 Mimicked

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38 Diamond club

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EEL JEST  
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