

EDUCATION

The underlying effects of AUTO-PASS IN HSC

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After 2019, a series of decisions regarding the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination has led to the credibility of the curriculum to be put to question.

The 2020 HSC batch was given auto-pass due to the pandemic. HSC 2021 was held on six subjects with 32 marks being reserved for each, and HSC 2022 was held on 45 marks for each subject. But more importantly, the syllabus was curtailed for these batches and it became a new standard even years after the pandemic. HSC 2023 was also held on a shortened syllabus.

However, the final nail in the coffin for the credibility of the HSC exam was when HSC 2024 was cancelled and auto-pass was implemented yet again.

Apart from the long-term consequences of this newly established culture, it is also unfair to the HSC candidates according to Najifa Anjum, an HSC 2024 candidate from Viqarunnisa Noon School and College (VNSC), "I was devastated to hear the news because it felt like a major portion of my batch only had their own interests at heart. To prepare for an exam for two years and yet, never get to sit for it and prove myself – it's just heartbreaking. It also felt morally wrong to forcefully get this demand fulfilled while the country has so many critical problems to deal with."

Sharlin Khan, another VNSC student of HSC batch 2024, feels that the decision to give an auto-pass to all HSC candidates undermines all the hard work and effort put into preparing for the HSC examination.

"The uncertainty and constant changes in the government's decision-making process have taken a toll on our mental well-being, causing significant stress and emotional strain. The impact of this decision extends beyond just academic concerns, affecting future opportunities of studying abroad," said Sharlin.

Moreover, the decision to cancel HSC has also made the admission preparation for these students significantly more complex.

"I'm going through a tough time regarding my admission preparations because if I had sat for my HSC exams, I would have had a lot more confidence regarding my basic preparations," said Nahina Akter Neha, another HSC 2024 candidate. "Now, I feel unsure whether I should start from scratch or jump into the admission process with coaching and private tuition. HSC also works as a reality check for many and if someone had an underwhelming result at HSC, they could work hard during the admission season and bounce right back. But due to the auto-pass decision, many candidates will not understand how prepared they are for the admission exams."

"Several public universities, such as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), and Bangladesh University of Textiles (BUTEX), have certain marks and grading requirements to sit for their admission tests. As most of the HSC exams were not held, the results are not justified for the students who worked hard to sit for certain admission tests," added Sharlin.

The auto-pass decision also hastened the admission preparation process for many students, as per Abrar Mahir, an HSC 2024 candidate from Notre Dame College.

"I expected that the HSC exams would either be postponed or held on reduced marks sometime around September, he said. "So, I wasn't ready to start my

admission preparation just yet. But now, I am having to change my plans and begin preparing early to give myself a head start. Before, I could take an hour every day to dip my toes in the water, go through the syllabus and ask seniors how to prepare. But now, coaching classes are starting early, so the pressure has increased with the accelerated admission phase."

Nomrota Mehzabin, an undergraduate student at BUET and an HSC 2020 candidate herself, believes that a college student cannot be judged based on her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or HSC result, saying, "Auto-pass ruins all the effort a student puts in college. I saw many of my friends, who were the least serious in school, put in a lot of effort in college. But because of the auto-pass decision back then (2020), all their efforts went in vain and they couldn't sit for admission

solution for their shortcomings," she said.

Abrar explained how the decision to implement auto-pass is unfair to qualified candidates, saying, "Auto-pass is a punishment for the students who worked really hard in college as their SSC marks were sub-par. For instance, I feel really frustrated because I had to endure weekly quizzes and practical exams in my college for two years, only to get an auto-pass. It's just not fair. In my opinion, most of the students who protested for the auto-pass only care about the certificate and not the long-term implications of the HSC exams."

But with the auto-pass decision implemented for the current HSC batch, what can be the solution moving forward?

Sharlin believes that authority should ensure that



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tests at some universities. The newly established culture of short syllabi is also extremely harmful. If you go through the entire HSC syllabus, you'll see that some chapters are connected to each other. All of these concepts are needed for a student to be prepared for their undergraduate studies, since there's a continuity between those chapters and a few undergraduate courses. If a student isn't familiar with these concepts, the HSC certificate will lose its value. I understand that the short syllabus decision might have been necessary at the time because of the pandemic, but this shouldn't have been continued."

Najifa also believes that the recent auto-pass decision by the interim government will make them look malleable.

"Since our batchmates essentially forced the interim government into making such a decision, the future HSC batches might get the idea that postponing exams and asking for an auto-pass is a plausible

the HSC exams properly reflect students' potential for future batches, "Moving forward, authorities need to ensure that students' academic achievements are accurately reflected no matter how unique the circumstances are. Furthermore, universities abroad could consider adjusting their admission timelines or offering flexibility in application requirements to accommodate students impacted by these circumstances. Such practical solutions can reduce the academic strain on students and ensure a smoother transition during this challenging period."

Najifa suggests that the grading for HSC 2024 should be done based on the seven exams they sat for.

"Auto-pass is the biggest insult to the merit-based system, one that the students actually fought for. No matter how much a batch protests, the government can't give in. If any other board exam is dismissed like this, the merit that we do have will dwindle at one point or the other," said Najifa.