Research Article

Reasons for the decline in the attendance of male students in secondary schools and colleges in Bangladesh, and what to do about it .

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Abstract : The attendance of female students in educational institutions in Bangladesh has increased significantly over the past two decades, especially at the primary and secondary levels, which is a milestone for eliminating gender inequality. However, at the same time, the attendance of male students at the secondary and higher secondary levels has decreased significantly in the past two decades, which has created new challenges in the country's overall human resource development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). This research article analyzes in depth the main reasons behind the disengagement of male students from education. The main reasons for the decline in the attendance of male students include family financial crisis and poverty, the tendency of child labour and employment in the informal sector, employment uncertainty and corruption, family and social expectations of men, digital addiction, the impact of side jobs, lack of quality education and irrelevance of the curriculum, weak teacher-student relationships, criminality and mental instability. In addition, policy measures taken in the past to emphasise girls' education, while successfully helping to reduce gender inequality, have indirectly created a new imbalance for boys. To address this problem, this article highlights the need for expansion of vocational and technical education, financial incentives, curriculum modernisation, teacher training, emphasis on supportive teaching methods, raising social awareness, and introducing community-based education

Keywords : Secondary education, dropout, gender inequality, male students, education system, poverty, child labor, gender equality, work-oriented education.

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1. Introduction

Due to religious, economic, and social factors, there were various barriers to girls' education in the Bangladeshi education system, resulting in higher enrollment and dropout rates than boys. However, in the past few decades, due to the combined efforts of the Bangladesh government and various development partners, there has been a remarkable interest in girls' education. The adoption of scholarships, free education, and other incentive programs has increased the attendance of girls in schools. These measures have played a significant role in increasing girls' educational opportunities, which is considered a milestone in achieving gender equality. An essential aspect of this success is the new shift in the gender balance in the education sector. While the old data from 1999 to 2003 showed a higher dropout rate for girls and a higher enrollment rate for boys, the picture is different today. Despite various programs proving highly

effective in increasing girls' attendance in educational institutions, the current situation is precisely the opposite. For example, according to a World Bank report, while the enrolment rate of girls has increased significantly due to the stipend program, the enrolment rate of poor boys has remained stagnant. This situation shows us that the emphasis on girls' education has created a new imbalance in the education system, which has now become a challenge for boys' participation in education. The decline in male enrollment in educational institutions is not only a gender equality issue but also a significant challenge for the human resource development and overall development of the country. Suppose a significant number of the male population in the country remains deprived of education or does not complete their education. In that case, it will hurt national productivity and social stability in the long run. Dropping out of school or leaving their education incomplete reduces the earning capacity of the individual and reduces employment opportunities. Without adequate education and skills, this large population will not be able to contribute effectively to the country's labor market, which will hinder the overall human resource formation and slow down economic growth. In addition, youth who are out of education are always at risk of social unrest, criminality, and weakened social cohesion. Therefore, addressing this problem is essential for the future prosperity and stability of Bangladesh.

The Methodology

The research is descriptive and analytical. The research work has been completed by analysing the secondary data. The data was collected from various reports of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), news, opinions, articles, and reports of academics and experts from different national dailies and news portals. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods, which helped in understanding the multifaceted nature of the problem. An attempt has been made to find out the root cause of the problem, its depth, and the way to solve it by arranging the obtained data in a specific framework

Problem Statement

Bangladesh's education sector has achieved significant success in the past decades. The presence of female students at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels has gradually increased. This achievement is a positive aspect of the country's education sector. However, the decline in the presence of male students at secondary and higher secondary levels has become a cause for concern. This is a new challenge for the country's overall human resource development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). This is not only an educational problem but is deeply linked to the socio-economic and cultural context. According to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), the overall dropout rate at the secondary level in 2023 was 32.85% and at the higher secondary level, 21.51%. Although these statistics do not directly mention gender-based segregation, the BANBEIS data for 2021 provides a specific picture for male students. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of boys at the secondary level (grades 6-10) was 66.40%, and the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) was 63.29% in 2021.

At the same time, the dropout rate for boys was 32.50%. At the higher secondary level (grades 11-12), the GER for boys was 48.50%, the NER was 41.88%, and the dropout rate was 20.74%. Analysing these statistics reveals that the low attendance and high dropout rate of boys at the secondary and higher secondary levels are increasing day by day. This trend has become more pronounced due to the closure of schools during COVID-19. According to a report by Time magazine, thousands of male students were forced to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and two-thirds of them were teenage boys who

did not return even after the reopening of schools. This is a significant reason for the absence of boys from educational institutions. According to a report by UNICEF, almost three-quarters of working children are boys. The gender equality aspect of education policy has been mainly focused on girls. Therefore, there has been success in providing scholarships and other incentives to encourage girls to study. However, no similar action plan has been taken, and incentives have been given to increase the attendance of male students, as a result of which a reverse gender gap has now been created in educational institutions. This may hinder the overall development of education in the country. Due to the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, the tendency of male students to join work has increased. As a result, many students have not returned to school. This is not only a personal educational loss for the student, but it will also negatively affect the future workforce and economic growth of the country. This problem deserves a deeper analysis.

Purpose of the study*
To present a detailed statistical picture of the decline of male students in educational institutions in Bangladesh.•Identify and analyse the multifaceted causes behind this problem.• Assess its potential socio-economic impacts on individual lives and the national economy.• Provide evidence-based and actionable recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders.

Reasons for the Decline in Student Enrolment
There are multiple reasons for the isolation of male students from education, arising from various aspects related to economic, socio-cultural, and educational systems.

1. Economic reasons
1.1. Family financial crisis and poverty. Poverty and family financial crises are one of the main reasons why boys drop out of school. According to a study, 91% of students drop out due to financial problems. Although primary education is free, secondary education in Bangladesh is not free, and incidental expenses such as tuition fees, books, and uniforms are burdensome for many families. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many families have been forced to send their children to work. During COVID-19, many male students were forced to drop out of school due to family financial crises. "Many families thought that studying was a luxury for those who had to struggle to buy essential commodities to live and survive during COVID-19. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the dropout rate of students aged 5-24 was only 3.10 per cent in 2019, but it has increased to 9.36 per cent in 2023. This increase indicates a trend of increasing dropout rates due to the financial crisis. According to Save the Children's 2019 report, 33% of male students drop out of secondary school due to financial constraints. According to UNICEF, about 50% of working children in Bangladesh do not go to school."In a patriarchal society, there is a prevalent perception of boys as the 'breadwinners' of the family." When the family is in financial crisis, this expectation puts pressure on the boys, causing them to drop out of school and join the workforce. This is a parallel reason why girls drop out due to child marriage. This is a big problem for low-income families, as secondary and college-level education is not free. While there are stipends for girls, the lack of similar widespread incentives for boys is driving them away from school. Discrimination is being created by giving stipends to girls and keeping boys away. Although stipends encourage girls' education, low-income families do not have enough financial means to continue educating boys, which can create a gender imbalance in the country's workforce in the long run. Table 1: The main reasons for the dropout of male students (according to students' perceptions) Percentage (agreed by the students) The financial difficulties 91% Lack of a supportive learning environment 77% The pressure of studying 60% The teacher-student relationship 50%

(reduces the risk of falling). Ignorance and lack of education have been mentioned.Source: ResearchGate 1 highlights financial hardship as the most significant factor behind the dropout of male students, with 91% of students agreeing. This is strong evidence that economic pressures are the primary driver of their disengagement from education.

1.2. Child labour and employment in the informal sectorBoys are often forced into child labour due to financial constraints. Child labour is a significant problem in Bangladesh, with approximately 4.7 million children aged 5-14 years engaged in child labour (2002-03 data). About three-quarters of the workers are children. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many boys and girls were forced by their families to work, while others volunteered to work in informal occupations and did not return to their studies after a period of work. About 85% of the labour market in Bangladesh is made up of the informal sector, where low productivity and low wages exist. The main occupations of this sector are street hawkers, workers in small enterprises, agriculture, poultry, fish processing, the garment industry, the leather industry, ship breaking, soap, bricks, cigarettes, shoes, furniture, glass, jute, textiles, restaurants, garbage collection, begging, and van pulling. Bangladesh labour, especially child labour, is very cheap. A child works an average of about 10 hours a day and earns an average of only 0-12 a month. Once you enter the informal sector, the chances of getting into formal employment are reduced. Low-income families send their sons to work for immediate financial benefits. They prioritise short-term living needs over long-term investments in education (future good jobs, higher incomes). Entering the informal sector does not provide good job opportunities in the future. It creates a "vicious cycle of poverty", where the lower-educated generation is trapped in low-skilled jobs, while the higher-educated generation gets high-paying and high-skilled jobs. As a result, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This hinders the overall economic development of the country. Bangladesh's child labour law states that no child below the age of 14 can be employed. However, this law does not apply to the informal sector. Poor enforcement of laws and a lack of monitoring systems are encouraging child labour, which is making the path back to education for male students more difficult.

1.3. Employment challenges and corruption. The labour market in Bangladesh is tough, especially for students from low-income families. Even after completing higher education, many boys are forced to leave their studies due to job uncertainty and session jams. Massive corruption and bribery in government jobs are a significant obstacle for poor students. Since the education system is not work-oriented, educated unemployment is increasing, which in turn is leading to a decrease in people's interest in education. According to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the graduate unemployment rate was 43% in 2019. Many students enter government or private jobs without completing high school or graduating. Because they don't think they have a job. Many have questioned the need for higher education. There is little difference in the income of a graduate and a graduate with an HSC pass. Suppose educational qualifications do not guarantee a good job, and corruption becomes a significant obstacle to getting a job. In that case, it is natural that the interest of students (especially boys) and their families in education will decrease. It creates distrust in the education system, increasing frustration and economic isolation among young people. Out of this frustration, the boy students turn to drug addiction, juvenile gangs, and other anti-social activities. The current education system is not able to provide adequate technical and vocational skills according to the market demand. As a result, there is a lack of skills among the educated youth. This skill gap is increasing unemployment and pushing

young people into informal or low-skill work, which is reducing their willingness to study.

2. Social and cultural factors

2.1. Masculine expectations and the role of the 'family breadwinner'"In the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, boys are seen as the future 'family breadwinners'." Due to such expectations of family and society, pressure is created on boys. As a result, one has to leave studies for a while and join work to earn quick money. Boys have higher expectations than girls. And the boys are forced to enter the labour market with little education while taking care of the family. In most cases, the purpose of educating girls is to prevent child marriage and to increase social status. On the other hand, the primary objective of boys' education is to equip them with the skills to take responsibility for employment and the maintenance of their family members. When a boy student fails to meet his academic goals, his interest in education decreases. This gender disparity creates an imbalance in the education system. Another reason why boys drop out of school is the desire to establish themselves abroad. With no job or employment opportunities in the country, as expected, they want to go abroad to earn money to establish themselves in society quickly.

2.2 Bad company and social deprivation of the reasons for the dropout of male students is the influence of bad friends. Crimes against children, youth, and women are increasing day by day. One of the leading causes of such social degradation is unemployment and economic uncertainty. According to the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), about 7 million people in Bangladesh are addicted to drugs, 80% of whom are aged between 15 and 30. It is also worth noting that about 83% of the unemployed population are young people aged 15-29. Lack of age-appropriate education and political instability are creating frustration and violence among young people. Young people who drop out of school and are unemployed sometimes get involved in criminal activities such as juvenile gangs, drug trafficking, and extortion. This is a serious threat to the family, society, and the state. Suppose the young generation cannot secure a stable life and suitable employment after obtaining their education certificate. In that case, they will be drawn into negative activities, leading to increased social degradation and instability. Many parents struggle to spend enough time with their children because both parents are working. As a result, a boy is not getting proper guidance and psychological support. As a result, boys are spending more time on modern devices and social media and gaining unbridled freedom. In families where family ties are not strong, young people are often drawn to adverse external influences. This eventually separates them from educational life.

2.3. Digital addictionWidespread use of digital media, primarily online gaming and addiction to social media, is causing students to lose interest in studies and negatively impacting academic careers. Addiction to digital media has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that 59% of boys aged 13-17 were addicted to online gaming, and this led to a decline in their academic performance. Excessive use of social media leads to loss of attention, sleep disturbances, increased stress, and anxiety. Although digital tools play an essential role in education, uncontrolled use and excessive addiction hurt physical and mental health. This not only harms the academic career but also hurts the overall health of the students, in addition to their family and social relationships. Although digital devices are used as learning aids in the developed world, our education system is failing to encourage the positive use of digital media. This addiction will increase further if the country fails to effectively utilize digital tools

in its modern teaching methods and provide training for teachers and students to use these tools.

2.4. The Desire to MigrateMigration, especially international migration, plays a vital role as a source of household income. Bangladesh's economy is highly dependent on foreign investment. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in the country, a large part of the young population goes abroad each year without completing their studies. Although the families and the government are somewhat financially stable through remittances, these less educated and unskilled young people have to work hard to earn money abroad. Due to the low likelihood of securing a good job through formal education, many male students opt to drop out of their studies and migrate in search of quick money. Instead of viewing education as a long-term investment, there is a growing tendency to seek quick financial gains by going abroad, which is another aspect of distrust in the education system.

2.5. Drug addiction and unemployment addiction is growing problem among young people, which isolates them from studies. According to the Department of Narcotics Control, 80% of drug addicts are between the ages of 15 and 30. Unemployment and job uncertainty cause widespread frustration among young people, leading them to drug addiction and other social degradation. About 2.6 million people in Bangladesh are unemployed, 83% of whom are in the 15-29 age group. Our education system is failing to develop moral values and positive thinking in students, and many universities have become platforms for political ideology instead of education due to political influence. This problem is increasing day by day due to the weak family bonding of the youth with their parents. Education not only imparts institutional knowledge to a student but also plays a role in the moral growth and social development of students. When the educational system fails to fulfil this responsibility, young people become depressed and turn to drugs or criminal activities. Teachers and education stakeholders need to focus not only on curriculum improvement but also on developing students' mental health, social skills, and moral values. Unemployment and drugs are not only personal problems but also social disorders that deteriorate the law and order situation in the country and take future generations to the brink of destruction.

3. Reasons related to education
3.1. Lack of quality education and supportive environment quality of education in Bangladesh is below international standards. Concern over the quality of education is a long-standing problem in Bangladesh. According to the World Bank report, many students end their educational journey without the necessary skills (reading, writing, and basic mathematics), which makes it difficult for them to secure a good job in the job market. As a result, the interest in learning decreases and the dropout rate increases. A 2022 study found that 16.78% of boys aged 5-16 could not read English, and 84.85% could not understand English text. 10.28% of boys are unable to read Bangla, and 14.19% struggle to identify single numbers in mathematics. The teacher-student ratio fell from 1:30 in 2011 to 1:36 in 2022, and the rate of trained teachers fell from 75.36% to 67.91%. Lack of supportive learning environments in educational institutions (77% of students agree) and inappropriate learning environments are among the leading causes of student dropout. When education fails to provide the necessary skills and its value in the job market decreases, students and parents lose interest in investing time and money in education. This is especially true for boys who are under pressure to earn fast. The lack of quality in education not only increases the dropout rate but also hampers the overall human resource development of the country, which causes it to lag in global competition. The deteriorating teacher-student ratio and lack of trained teachers directly

affect the quality of education. Inadequate school facilities and an uninspiring curriculum reduce student interest. It creates a vicious cycle: low-quality education -> students' disinterest -> dropouts -> inefficient workforce.

3.2. Teacher-student relationship The teacher-student relationship plays a vital role in student learning. Studies have shown that 50% of students think a positive teacher-student relationship can reduce the risk of falling. However, strict discipline at the secondary level or the indifference of teachers in higher education hurts boys. Boys are more influenced by teacher-student relationships than girls. According to student perceptions, teacher bullying increases the dropout rate from school. The unruly behaviour of teachers is considered one of the reasons for the dropout. Since the teacher-student relationship has a greater influence on boys, the behaviour of teachers and their support towards them is critical to retaining boys in education. Strict discipline or indifference can create isolation in boys. Teachers need gender-sensitive training to understand the diverse needs and sensitivities of both boys and girls, enabling them to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. "The teacher-student relationship affects not only academic performance but also students' mental health and their sense of 'belongingness' at school." Bullying or negative behaviour reduces students' interest in coming to school. Creating a positive and supportive emotional environment, where students feel safe and receive support from teachers, is essential in reducing dropout rates.

3.3. Lack of education and lack of the current education system and curriculum are often not in line with the real-life needs of students and the job market. As a result, many students feel that their studies will not create good job opportunities in the future, which creates disinterest in education among them. According to the World Bank, many students end their education without the necessary skills. Educated unemployment is increasing because the education system is not work-oriented. There is a lack of skills in the labour market in Bangladesh, and the existing education system is not able to provide the necessary technical and vocational skills. When students understand the future career connection to their current studies, they become more interested in education. If the curriculum does not meet the demands of the labour market, students may view studying as a waste of time and money, especially for boys who are under pressure to earn fast. It is essential to make the curriculum more work-oriented and relevant so that students believe that their education will help them succeed in future careers. This will not only reduce the dropout rate but also contribute to the economic development of the country. The education system is lagging in meeting the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and in meeting the demand for new skills. A curriculum based on memorisation is failing to develop students' critical thinking and practical skills. The education system needs to adapt to the rapidly changing labour market so that students become a skilled workforce, not just degree holders.

3.4. Age discrimination is a significant problem in secondary schools. Many students, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, attend school late or return after taking a break from studies for various reasons. As a result, they are older than other students in their class. This age-class disparity can create discomfort and isolation among students, which increases the risk of falls. Older students, primarily 9th and 10th graders, are at higher risk of falling. Class-wise enrolment shows that the number of students in higher classes is significantly reduced. Family financial crises and child labour force students to attend school late or take a break from studies, creating an age-class disparity. Age-class disparity is not only an educational problem, but it is also considered a symptom of poverty and social inequality. To solve this problem, students need flexible teaching

methods and financial support. The traditional education system may not always be suitable for those who have dropped out of school. They require specialised, flexible, and age-appropriate educational programmes. If this disparity is not removed, many potential students will be left out of the education system, which will hurt the country's human resource development in the long run.

Recommendations

Increasing the attendance of male students in educational institutions is an essential factor that directly affects their educational life. It is essential to make specific recommendations in this regard and take appropriate measures to implement them. This will not only increase the attendance rate but also improve the quality of education and reduce the rate of boy student dropouts. An integrated and multi-pronged policy is needed to tackle the problem of declining boy student attendance. Education is one of the means of personal, family, social, and state progress. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the following recommendations to prevent the dropout of male students and increase their attendance in educational institutions.

1. Vocational and technical educationExpansion of vocational and technical education is essential to make the education system employable. This will help young boys with special needs acquire the skills necessary for specific jobs. Vocational and technical education creates opportunities for employment and self-sufficiency. Initiatives such as UNICEF's Alternative Learning Programme (ALP) provide skill-based literacy programmes for out-of-school youth, preparing them for jobs in the high-growth sector. 96% of ALP graduates have found employment. When education creates direct employment opportunities, students understand its value and are interested in studying. It helps alleviate the frustration associated with unemployment and facilitates reintegration into education. Vocational education not only increases personal income but also contributes to the economic growth of the country and helps in turning "population into public wealth". It is necessary to increase the connection of educational institutions with large employers and create curricula according to the market demand. The concerted efforts of the government, private sector, and NGOs can make vocational education more effective and create direct employment avenues for students.

2. Financial Incentives and Social SecurityBoys from poor and marginalised families can play an effective role in providing financial incentives for students and reducing the dropout rate of social safety net programmes. Poverty is one of the main reasons for student dropouts. While the universal stipend programme for girls is in place, similar incentives for boys are provided on a smaller scale. Initiatives such as the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project provide stipends and free books, stationery, and uniforms to poor children. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes have proven effective in reducing child labour and promoting boys' education. Since stipends have been successful for girls, similar financial incentives should be introduced for boys so that low-income families are not forced to engage in child labour instead of sending their boys to educational institutions due to financial crises. This will help achieve gender equality in education and will play an effective role in reducing the dropout rate of boys. Education is a powerful tool to break the cycle of poverty. To break this vicious cycle, it is necessary to retain students in school by providing financial support, thereby playing a positive role in alleviating poverty in the long run.

3. Reforming the Education System and Improving Quality is essential to modernise the curriculum and align it with the demands of the job market to improve the quality of education and retain the interest of the students. The curriculum should focus on

competency-based and applied knowledge, rather than just knowledge-based. Students will become more interested in education when they find a future career connection to their studies. Curriculum reforms can be made to develop higher thinking and skills in the students. With the help of the World Bank and ADB, efforts have been made to reform the curriculum in Bangladesh, in which work-oriented and life-skill-based education has gained importance. Curriculum should be designed to help students develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical skills, preparing them to be competent citizens for their future careers. This will increase the interest in education among students and contribute to the economic growth of the country by reducing the educated unemployment rate. The curriculum should be made more flexible and diverse according to students' interests and market demands. Real-world problems and career pathways can be included.

4. Teacher Education and TrainingImproving the quality of teachers and teaching methods is essential. Teachers should be provided with regular training so that they can adapt themselves to modern teaching-learning methods and be able to meet the desired needs of students. It is essential to improve the teacher-student relationship and stop various types of harassment by teachers. Teacher-student relationships have a significant impact on children. The number of qualified teachers in the country is very low. The lack of adequate training and support for teachers affects the quality of education. The mental pressure and physical-emotional torture given by teachers hurt students. Teachers need not only academic but also mental health support and training on positive teaching methods, which will help in creating a supportive learning environment. Teachers should be trained to be gender-sensitive so that they can understand the different needs and problems of both boys and girls.

5. Ensuring a conducive environment in educational institutionsEnsuring a safe and supportive environment for students is essential. Students' mental health problems and depression will increase if educational institutions do not include an adequate variety of facilities, a motivational curriculum, and academic support. Along with the physical environment, the mental environment is also essential. There is a need to establish mental health support centres and counselling services for students, especially boys who suffer from depression and various forms of addiction. Many students drop out due to a lack of a supportive learning environment. Educational institutions should be centres of holistic development of students and not just centres of academic knowledge. A safe and beautiful educational environment will significantly increase students' interest in attending school and reduce their dropout rate.

6. Social awareness and family involvement are important to promote the positive use of digital media and raise awareness to prevent addiction to it. A concerted effort by families, educational institutions, and policymakers can reduce digital addiction. Online gaming and social media addiction can negatively impact academic performance. Technology can be a powerful tool in education. Still, its unregulated use is increasingly taking students away from their core responsibilities, and educational institutions should teach the responsible use of technology. Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to use technology but also the capacity to comprehend its ethical and social implications. It will protect young people from online dangers and teach them to use their time effectively. Many parents are giving their children gadgets and unlimited freedom without providing them with enough guidance. Parents need to be aware of the dangers of digital media and encourage children to control their screen time.

7. Changing the concept of masculinity is essential to change the pressure on boys to be 'breadwinners' in a patriarchal society. The prevailing patriarchal norms in society perpetuate the gender gap. Gender equality includes not only the empowerment of girls but also positive roles for boys. The social structure needs to be changed. Men and women should share the responsibility of the family equally, rather than placing the burden of family care solely on men. This will reduce unnecessary pressure on boys and create more opportunities for their educational and personal development. Discussions on the importance of education in the family, as well as equal opportunities and responsibilities for both boys and girls, should be encouraged to prevent boys from dropping out to meet financial needs.

8. Community-based education and reintegration programmesCommunity-based and flexible education programmes are needed to bring male students who have dropped out of school back into education. Initiatives such as the World Bank's Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) II and UNICEF's Let Us Learn (LUL) programme are playing an essential role in this regard. The ROSC project provides second-chance education for out-of-school children in rural upazilas and urban slums. Programmes such as Ananda Schools and Alternative Learning Pathways (ALP) offer flexible schedules and vocational training. NGOs such as the SAWAB Foundation run programmes for formal and non-formal education, vocational training, and street children. The Ability-Based Accelerated Learning (ABAL) programme helps students learn according to their individual learning needs. The traditional school system may not be suitable for those who have dropped out of school. Flexible schedules, age-appropriate curriculum, and practical skills-based training create opportunities for them to return to education. These programmes not only provide educational opportunities but also help in social inclusion and boost the confidence of the youth. Collaboration between the government and NGOs, along with recognition and support of community-based schools, can enhance the effectiveness of these programmes. The involvement of the local community makes the above activities more effective and sustainable.

9. Policy interventions and coordinated efforts integrated and multi-tiered action plan is needed to tackle the problem of declining attendance of male students. Effective coordination between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Welfare, and non-governmental organisations is essential. The government has implemented various policy reforms, including curriculum revision and improvements in the teacher recruitment system. Policy support and financial support are both necessary for reforms. Strategies such as academic support programmes, social mobilisation, financial support, and technological interventions are effective in improving the quality of education and preventing student dropout. There are multi-dimensional reasons (economic, social, and educational) for the dropout of male students. Therefore, it is not possible to solve this problem with the efforts of the Ministry of Education alone. There is a need for coordinated policies and programmes between the Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare, Youth Development, and non-governmental organisations. A holistic approach and coordinated efforts will lead to more effective results in dealing with this complex issue. Collection and analysis of high-quality data on the causes and trends of student dropouts is essential for policy formulation. It is necessary to check the effectiveness of policies through regular monitoring and evaluation and change them if necessary.

Conclusion
The decline in the attendance of male students at the secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh is a complex and multi-dimensional problem, which is hurting the

country's future human resources and economic development. To tackle this problem, it is not enough just to reform the education sector; a coordinated and targeted action plan is also needed at the socio-economic, cultural, and policy levels. This problem should be treated as a national problem with priority, and specific strategies and programmes should be adopted for boys by learning from the successes achieved in the education of girls. It is essential to focus on improving the quality of education, promoting work-oriented education, providing financial support, raising social awareness, and supporting the mental and social development of young people. For future guidance, more in-depth research is needed on the causes of male students dropping out and their increased interest in education. It is necessary to review how effective the existing education policies are for male students and adopt new policies and programmes as needed. Public and private investment should be increased in the education sector, especially in vocational and technical education, so that students can acquire skills according to the demand of the job market. It is essential to make families and local communities aware of the importance of boys' education and to ensure their active participation. There is a need to develop strategies that utilize digital media as an educational aid and implement various programs to combat digital addiction. This will enable the creation of skilled workforce by leveraging the positive aspects of information technology while mitigating its adverse effects.

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