



When Harvesting Meets Exams: Rethinking Public Examination Scheduling in the Haor Regions of Sunamganj, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Background and Aims: In Bangladesh, public examinations are commonly scheduled during the peak agricultural harvesting season, particularly in the haor regions where farming is the primary livelihood. This overlap may create significant challenges for students from agricultural households, limiting their study time and increasing educational disparities between rural and urban learners. This study investigates how the overlap between peak harvesting periods and public examination schedules affects students' academic preparation, psychological well-being, and educational outcomes in the haor regions of Sunamganj, Bangladesh. It also explores policy measures to reduce the conflict between agricultural responsibilities and examination demands.

Methodology: A quantitative research design was employed using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire survey of 400 students from four haor-based upazilas of Sunamganj District: Dera, Shulla, Tahirpur, and Bishwamberpur. Cluster sampling was used to select respondents. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, were applied to analyze the data, while secondary sources were reviewed to examine the relationship between agricultural calendars and national examination schedules.

Results: The findings reveal that 90% of respondents were directly involved in agricultural activities during the peak harvesting season, while 80% reported having no study time during the month of Baishakh. All respondents indicated that examinations conducted during this period negatively affected their preparation, mental health, and academic performance. Furthermore, 100% perceived themselves to be disadvantaged compared to urban students. Comparative analyses of examination results showed that students from rural institutions generally performed better when examinations were held outside the peak harvesting season. The study also identified a persistent mismatch between Bangladesh's public examination calendar and agricultural cycles, particularly for SSC, HSC, university, and recruitment examinations.

Conclusion: The overlap between peak harvesting periods and public examination schedules constitutes a significant structural barrier to educational equity in rural Bangladesh. The findings suggest that academic disadvantages experienced by rural students are rooted in institutional scheduling practices rather than individual capability. Aligning examination schedules with agricultural cycles, introducing flexible assessment opportunities, and expanding access to agricultural mechanization could help reduce educational disparities and promote more equitable learning outcomes.

Keywords: Public Exams Schedule, Peak Harvesting Season, Educational Disparity, Rural and Urban Area, Policy Solutions

Introduction

Bangladesh is widely recognized as an agrarian country where agriculture plays a pivotal role in shaping livelihoods, rural culture, and social structures. A significant portion of the nation depends directly or indirectly on agriculture, farming, and fishing cycles, which strongly influence their daily life. Among these cycles, the harvesting period—particularly during the Bengali month of Baishakh—demands intensive labor for activities like harvesting, threshing, drying, and storing crops. At the same time, Bangladesh keeps up a centralized public examination system and various recruitment tests that consistently take place during this peak harvesting month. This overlap actually creates critical challenges for students from rural and agrarian backgrounds, who are frequently needed to help their families in agricultural activities during the peak harvesting period. As a result, they experience mental stress, disruptions in their studies, and little preparation time for examinations, which significantly shape their academic and professional goal.

While students from urban areas can literally dedicate uninterrupted time to their academic preparation, students from rural areas experience a dual burden of academic and family responsibilities. This mismatch not only impacts individual performance but also reinforces systematic educational inequality. Although the same issues exist in other agrarian countries in the world, many have adopted





flexible academic calendars or alternative assessment systems to mitigate such overlapping, such as India (Kingdon, G 2007) and Japan (Malia, 2025). However, in Bangladesh, such adaptive measures remain limited.

Moreover, compared to other agrarian parts of the country, haor region in Sunamganj is unique due to its vast wetland, a huge source of paddy nearly 13,70,200 tonnes (Chowdhury, 2024) in dry season, seasonal flood risks, about more than 80 percent people are the direct victim of this hazard (Islam, Babu, et al, 2021) and a large number of populations living in the area. Academically, 72 percent of students are from rural and haor areas (Alam, 2026), and 76 percent of educational institutes are in the region (Ahmed T.T & Tarique, 2024). These factors actually make the Haor region in Sunamganj unique compared to other agrarian parts of the country.

Despite the growing trend of research on similar issues like child labor, inequality in education, and rural-urban disparities, the specific issue of overlapping peak harvesting season with public examination schedules remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how such overlapping affects rural students' mental well-being and academic performance, and suggesting policy measures to ensure an equitable system of education. By exploring both primary and secondary data, the study seeks to highlight an overlooked dimension of systematic educational inequality and suggests pragmatic policy solutions to address the issue.

Terminological Clarification

To ensure conceptual clarity for both local and international readers, several key terms used throughout this study are defined within the socio-educational context of Bangladesh.

1. **Baishakh**: First month of the Bengali calendar, beginning in mid-April in the Gregorian calendar, marks the peak paddy harvesting season in many haor regions of northeastern Bangladesh. During this period, farming households experience intense labor demands associated with harvesting, threshing, drying, and storing crops. Because of the labor-intensive nature of agricultural production in these regions, students from farming families are often expected to participate in these activities alongside their academic responsibilities.

2. **SSC (Secondary School Certificate)** exam represents the national public examination conducted after secondary education, generally covering Grades 9 and 10.

3. **HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate)** examination is conducted after Grades 11 and 12 and serves as a prerequisite for higher education admission. In addition, the study references university examinations, admission tests, and the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Examination, a highly competitive national recruitment examination for first-class government service positions.

4. **Public Examination**: In this article, public exams refer to nationally standardized examinations conducted under centralized educational authorities in which students across the country participate simultaneously according to a fixed schedule. These examinations play a decisive role in academic progression, higher education access, and employment opportunities in Bangladesh.

5. **Haor**: Geographically, a haor is a distinctive wetland ecosystem characterized by bowl-shaped floodplain depressions that remain submerged during the monsoon season and become agriculturally productive during the dry season. According to the Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board (BHWDB, 2012), these regions are highly vulnerable to seasonal flooding and climate-related disruptions, making agricultural livelihoods both crucial and uncertain. Such environmental conditions significantly influence local educational experiences and labor patterns.

6. **Upazila**: The research is conducted in selected upazilas of Sunamganj district. An upazila is an administrative sub-district within Bangladesh's local government structure, functioning as an intermediate administrative unit between the district and union levels. Understanding these administrative and geographic contexts is important for interpreting how seasonal agricultural realities intersect with educational planning and examination scheduling in rural Bangladesh.





Research Questions

The answers to the following questions have been prioritized in the study.

1. Do the schedules of public examinations during the peak harvesting time create disadvantages for students from rural and farming backgrounds?
2. How do agricultural seasons, particularly the peak harvesting period, impact students' mental and academic preparation?
3. Is there any observable variation in the academic performance of rural students when public examinations are scheduled outside the peak harvesting season?
4. What policy measures can be introduced to minimize the conflict between the peak harvesting period and public examination schedules?

Literature Review

The relationship between seasonal labor demands and academic outcomes has been widely discussed within the broader framework of educational inequality, particularly in agrarian societies. Existing literature suggests that students from rural and agricultural backgrounds often face systematic disadvantages due to their engagement in agricultural activities, especially during the peak harvesting period.

One of the significant theoretical perspectives used to elaborate this phenomenon is the theory of opportunity cost within human capital theory. Becker (1964) states that time allocated to non-educational activities, like agriculture and labor, reduces the time remaining for skill acquisition and learning. In the context of agriculture, children and adolescents are frequently required to contribute to their families in farming activities, which increases the opportunity cost of education and negatively affects academic performance.

Empirical research across developing countries shows substantial evidence supporting this argument. For example, a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia highlights that agricultural cycles significantly influence attendance of students and learning outcomes (Basu & Van, 1998), Edmonds (2007). During planting and harvesting periods, school absenteeism tends to increase, leading to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates.

In the context of Bangladesh, several studies have highlighted rural-urban disparities in education, often attributing these gaps to socioeconomic factors, infrastructure limitations, and access to resources (Asadullah & Rahman, 2009). Existing literature indicates that students in rural regions face disadvantages linked to poverty, infrastructural limitations, and restricted educational opportunities. However, much of this scholarship examines educational inequality from economic or institutional perspectives without adequately considering how seasonal agricultural labor affects students' academic preparation and examination performance.

An empirical study conducted in Bangladesh identifies that agricultural labor demand has a significant impact on rural students' educational participation and performance. Research highlights that during the peak harvesting period, particularly in the rice-planting and harvesting season, school attendance tends to decline as students are frequently required to assist their families in harvesting and post-harvest activities. This seasonal engagement in agricultural activities by students often leads to learning interruptions, decline in classroom engagement, and weaker academic performance among rural students (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

A development-focused study reveals that educational disparity in Bangladesh is not solely determined by income inequalities but also by temporal constraints imposed by agricultural livelihoods. Scholars argue that rural students face a "seasonal poverty of time," where peak harvesting periods significantly reduce their capability to focus on academic preparation, particularly for competitive exams. This structural disparity reinforces long-term educational disadvantage in rural communities (World Bank, 2018).

Moreover, research on academic stress shows that students encountering multiple responsibilities face higher levels of mental stress, which can adversely affect cognitive performance (Putwain, 2007). For rural students engaged in agricultural work, the dual burden of assisting their families in harvesting and high-stakes examination schedules increases stress and reduces performance efficiency.





Comparative research from developed countries indicates that flexible assessment systems can mitigate such challenges. For example, in countries like Japan, academic calendars and examination systems often incorporate flexibility, including multiple testing opportunities and decentralized scheduling (Malia, 2025), which help to accommodate diverse student needs.

Additionally, the role of agricultural machinery has been recognized as a factor in reducing labor dependency. Studies suggest that greater access to modern farming technologies can reduce the need for human labor, thereby allowing for greater time allocation for education (Pingali, 2007). But in many developing countries, including Bangladesh, advanced agricultural machinery remains uneven and insufficient, particularly in areas vulnerable to climate and extreme weather.

However, the existing trend of literature on various issues like child labor, inequality in education, and rural-urban disparities shows educational inequality in Bangladesh, but limited attempts have been made on the specific issue of overlapping peak harvesting season with public examination schedules, which remains underexplored. So, this research aims to examine the extent to which the timing of public examinations intersects with agricultural seasons, particularly the peak harvesting month (Baishakh), and how it affects students' mental well-being and academic outcomes in rural Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in a combination of theoretical approaches that explore the relationship between agricultural labor, time allocation, and academic performance. In particular, the article draws on Human Capital Theory, Opportunity Cost Theory, and the theory of Educational Inequality to examine how seasonal labor demands affect students' academic outcomes and mental health in rural Bangladesh.

Human Capital Theory, as explained by Becker (1964), identifies that education is an investment that enriches individuals' creativity and future earnings. According to this approach, time and resources devoted to education play a vital role in the enrichment of human capital. However, in agricultural contexts, students from farming families are often needed to allocate their time to agricultural activities, particularly during peak harvesting seasons. This actually reduces their time remaining for study and skills acquisition, thereby reducing the progress of human capital and negatively affecting academic performance.

Closely related to this approach, the Opportunity Cost theory refers to the trade-off between competing uses of time and resources. For rural students, time spent on farming activities comes at the expense of educational engagement. During the peak harvesting period, the opportunity cost of preparing for examinations becomes considerably higher, as students are required to help their families with agricultural activities. This trade-off literally leads to limited study time, absenteeism, and lower academic outcomes.

The research again incorporates the approach of Educational Inequality, which focuses on how contextual factors create uneven learning opportunities among various social groups. In the Bangladesh context, rural students experience a dual burden: limited opportunity to education and the burden of agricultural activities. The overlap between public examination schedules and peak harvesting period further deepens this inequality, keeping rural students at a systemic disadvantage compared to their urban classmates.

Moreover, "Seasonal Time Poverty" is relevant in exploring how seasonal labor demands constrain students' capability to allocate their time for exam preparation. During the harvesting month, rural people face intense labor demands, leading to a considerable reduction in time available for academic preparation of rural students.

Overall, these theoretical approaches offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex intersection between seasonal labor demands and academic outcomes. They indicate that the challenges experienced by rural students are not merely due to individual limitations but are deeply rooted in structural and institutional rigid exam schedules. Thus, these approaches support the necessity for policy recommendations that consider agricultural cycles in educational planning.





Methodology

This research is carried out through primary and secondary data, adopting a quantitative approach. By applying this method, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the overlap between peak harvesting season and public examination schedules affects rural students' mental health and academic performance in Bangladesh.

Study Area and Population

The study is conducted in selected rural areas of Bangladesh, with a particular insight into agriculturally intensive regions such as Derai, Tahirpur, Bishwamberpur, and Shulla upazila in Sunamganj district. The listed populations contain students who are currently preparing for or have recently participated in public examinations (SSC—Secondary School Certificate, HSC—Higher Secondary Certificate, undergraduate and graduate level exams, along with various government recruitment tests), particularly those from farming and Agricultural background.

Sampling Technique and Size

A cluster sampling method is conducted to select respondents who are directly or indirectly involved in agricultural activities. By using a cluster approach, we divide a district into some Upazilas and Upazilas into some unions and wards to easily conduct the survey, and this sampling has been used because it's almost impossible to execute the survey across the Upazilas. Data are collected from unions and wards randomly from the Clustered Upazilas. The research focuses on collecting data from approximately 400 students, 100 from each Upazila, to ensure adequate representation, and both male and female respondents are included to ensure gender-based integrity in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Primary data in the study is collected through a well-structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire is divided into several parts, such as demographic information, involvement in agricultural activities, psychological stress, academic impact, and policy recommendations. The survey is conducted through both semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire for the respondents to fill out when necessary. For collecting primary data, four representatives have been employed from the four regions who are also studying in different universities, and based on their past experiences in data collection, working with their professor, honesty, and integrity, we employed them to ensure the reliability of the study. On the other hand, secondary data is collected from government official sources, newspapers, academic calendars, agricultural season data, and relevant reports, like journal articles and policy documents, which are also reviewed to support the analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data are analyzed using various tables, charts, and tools like Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics like percentage, frequency, and distribution are used to summarize the data. Comparative analysis is employed to explore the academic outcomes of rural students when exams are held beyond the peak harvesting season to identify the impact of overlapping on their academic performance and mental well-being. Moreover, where necessary, qualitative data from open-ended questions are explained using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key issues related to students' experiences and challenges.

Ethical Considerations

The research follows highly ethical standards. Participation in the study is voluntary, and respondents are pre-informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity are highly maintained. Moreover, respondents are allowed to withdraw at any stage of the survey.

Findings and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Regarding primary data collected from 400 students (100 from each Upazila) in four haor-based upazilas of Sunamganj district—Derai, Shulla, Tahirpur, and Bishwamberpur, the study shows that 70 percent of the respondents' age ranges from 15–20 years, followed by 25 percent aged 21–25, and 5 percent aged 27–32.





Table 01 shows the age range of respondents.

Age range	Percentage
15-20	70
21-25	25
27-32	5
Total	100

(Field survey, 2026)

In terms of gender, 80 percent are male and 20 percent female respondents. Educationally, 50 percent are SSC-level students, 30 percent HSC-level, while a lower proportion consists of undergraduate 10 percent, graduate 7 percent, and job seekers 3 percent.

Table 02 expresses the education level of participants in the study.

Education level	Percentage
SSC	50
HSC	30
Undergraduate	10
Graduate	7
Job seekers	3
Total	100

(Field survey, 2026)

Notably, when asked about their residency and agricultural involvement, 100 percent of respondents replied that they are living in rural and haor areas, and 90 percent of their families rely primarily on agriculture, indicating the agrarian nature of the survey population.

Table 03 indicates residency and financial activities of the research participants.

	Percentage
Residency: Rural and Haor area	100
Primary Activities: Involvement in agriculture	90

(Field survey, 2026)

Agricultural Inclusion and Time Allocation

When asked about study time and agricultural inclusion, 90 percent of respondents reported direct involvement in agricultural activities, including harvesting, threshing, drying, and storing crops during the peak harvesting month, and 10 percent replied others, which significantly represents Table 03. These findings strongly support the Theory of Opportunity Cost, which argues that time spent on one activity reduces the time remaining for another. During the peak harvesting month (Baishakh), 80 percent of the students reported having (0) zero hours of study per day, while only 20 percent managed to study 0–2 hours. Interestingly, no one reported studying beyond 2 hours. Furthermore, supporting this claim, all respondents stated that their study time had decreased during this period.

Table 04 highlights the study time of respondents during the peak harvesting month.

Study Time	Percentage of Students
0 (zero) hours	80
0-2 hours	20
Above 2 hours	0

(Field survey, 2026)

These findings show a severe trade-off between seasonal labor and academic outcomes, where rural students' academic engagement is significantly affected due to seasonal labor demands.





Impact on Exam Preparation and Performance

When asked what kinds of difficulties they face due to the overlapping, 90 percent of respondents replied that they experience difficulty in preparing for examinations during the peak harvesting season, and they also reported that scheduling public examinations during this period negatively affects their academic outcomes and mental health. Specifically, respondents indicated less preparation time, lower GPA, and increased mental stress, selecting ‘all’ these factors as key impacts.

Table 05 shows how peak harvesting season affects respondents' academic outcomes.

		Number of students
Challenges faced by Students:	Difficulties in preparing for exams	90%
Impact On:	Preparing time, GPA, Mental Health	--

(Field survey, 2026)

This result aligns with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which indicates that limited investment in education—due to time constraints—declines skill development and academic performance. The overlap between examination schedules and peak harvesting season thus directly undermines human capital development among students from haor areas.

Psychological Stress

When asked about psychological stress, a large number of respondents reported experiencing mental stress due to the overlap between public examination schedules and the peak harvesting period. Among them, 70 percent indicated exam preparation as the primary source of mental stress, while 30 percent reported family responsibilities. Interestingly, 80 percent indicated that both factors contribute simultaneously, reflecting a “dual burden” phenomenon.

Table 06 focuses on psychological stress on students during the peak harvesting month.

Source of mental stress	Number of respondents
Exam preparation	70%
Family responsibility (assisting)	30%
Both	80%

(Field survey, 2026)

This result supports the concept of Seasonal Time Poverty, where people face severe time constraints due to seasonal labor demands. In rural regions, students are naturally forced to balance family labor obligations with academic expectations, leading to mental stress and reduced cognitive performance.

Perceived Systematic Inequality

A striking finding of the study is that 100 percent of respondents perceive they are backed compared to urban students. This perception indicates a systematic inequality in education, where students from rural areas experience additional burdens not faced by their urban classmates.

Secondary data further supports this claim. Studies highlight that approximately 72 percent of SSC and HSC students in Bangladesh come from rural areas, yet a considerably smaller number reach higher education (Alam 2026). Additionally, 76 percent of educational institutions are located in rural areas (Ahmed T.T & Tareque, 2024), but structural disparities persist, leading to lower academic performance. Studies also indicate that in the SSC Exam of 2023, a total of 48 schools with (0) zero pass rates are situated in rural regions (Ahmed T.T & Tareque, 2024).

These results strongly align with the Concept of Educational Inequality, which highlights how structural and contextual factors like geographic location and economic dependency create inequality in learning opportunities.

Conflict Between the Agricultural Calendar and the Examination Schedule

The analysis of secondary data reveals a clear mismatch between agricultural cycles and the academic calendar in Bangladesh. The major harvesting season, Baishakh, starts from mid-April (Daily Star, 2018), coinciding with the scheduling of key public examinations, including SSC, HSC, Honors examinations of national and public universities, and other recruitment tests.





For instance, SSC examinations in recent years have consistently been scheduled from April to May (Mamun, A.2026; NCTB, 2026), directly overlapping with peak harvesting season. Similarly, university admission tests and national-level competitive exams are also scheduled within the same timeframe. For instance, the National University Admission Test (for the 2025-2026 season) is scheduled on 25 April, 2026 (National University, 2026), and the Honors Final year's exams of National University are scheduled from 30 April to 15 June, 2026 (StudentsBD, 2026). Notably, as Bangladesh education boards follow the Gregorian calendar rather than the Bengali calendar, secondary exams were consistently scheduled in the planting season (December-January) and Higher secondary exams in the peak harvesting month (Ito & Schoncoy S, 2025). Moreover, other competitive exams, such as BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service), are held during the peak Harvesting month. For example, the recent 50th BCS written exams were held from 09 April to 07 May, 2026 (BPSC, 2026). More importantly, the Bangladesh academic calendar is divided into two stages: Half—Yearly— January to May and Annual Examination—July to December (Dhaka Tribune, 2026). For this, each year, all public exams, including secondary and higher secondary half-yearly and annual exams, consecutively intersect the peak harvesting month and planting season in Bangladesh (Ito & Shonchoy S, 2025). This significantly affects mental well-being and academic performance for students from rural and hour area.

Again, secondary data reveal that when public exams are held in other months instead of the peak harvesting season, April, students from rural areas perform well. For instance, we got access to collect SSC results of 2022 and 2023 of two schools from the above-mentioned Upazilas using their inn number. The data are shown in the table below.

Table 07 shows the SSC results of two Institutes when exams were held at different times.

Inn	Institute Name	SSC Result (Exam, September,2022)	SSC Result (Exam, April, 2023)
129999	Hafiz Ali High School, Sulla	Total Examinees:74 Passed:55 Not Passed:19 Passing rate :74.32%	Total Examinees:76 Passed:52 Not passed:24 Passing rate :68%
129871	Tarol High School, Derai	Total Examinee:51 Passed: 47 Not passed:4 Passing rate :92.16%	Total Examinee:32 Passed:29 Not passed: 3 Passing rate :90.62%

(The data can be verified by using the government official link <https://eboardresults.com/v2/home>, by filling Board: Sylhet, Exam: SSC, type of result: institution analytics, then use the given inn number.)

Additionally, considering the effect of Covid-19, a little change was made to SSC's curriculum, and public exams were held at different times, such as the SSC Exam 2022 held in September and SSC exam 2023 in April highlight that average passing rate of 2022 was 87.44 percent (UNB, 2022) and average passing rate of SSC result in 2023 was 80.39 percent (Daily Star, 2023). It indicates that when exam schedules are out of the peak harvesting season, students from rural areas perform well.

Moreover, to strengthen the study's claim and to lighten Covid issue, we include HSC results of two Colleges of the above Upazilas when exams were held at different times, particularly before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, HSC exams of 2018 held in April (peak harvesting month, Baishakh) and exams of 2023 held in August illustrate the following data, which are presented below.

Table 08 illustrates the HSC results of 2018 and 2023 when exams were held in different months.

Inn Number	College Name	HSC result 2018 (Exam, April, 2018)	HSC result 2023 (Exam, August,2023)
129887	Derai Degree College, Derai	Total Examinee: 885 Appeared:881 Passed:517 Passing rate: 58.68	Total examinee:820 Appeared:818 Passed:554 Passing rate: 67.73





Inn Number	College Name	HSC result 2018 (Exam, April, 2018)	HSC result 2023 (Exam, August, 2023)
130078	Jainal Abedin College, Tahirpur	Total: 143 Passed: 68 Passing rate :50.75	Total: 161 Passed: 106 Passing rate :66.67

(The data can be verified by using the government official link <https://eboardresults.com/v2/home>, by filling Board: Sylhet, Exam: HSC, type of result: institution analytics, then use the given inn number.)

By comparing tables 07 and 08, the article shows that when public exams are held outside the peak harvesting month (in table 07, SSC September 2022, and in table 08, HSC August 2023, the academic outcomes of rural students become comparatively higher. On the other hand, when these exams are held within the harvesting season (in Table 07, SSC April, 2022, and in Table 08, HSC April, 2018), the academic outcomes of rural students become comparatively lower, which indicates that overlapping the academic calendar with agricultural cycles creates a disadvantage for rural and Haor area students.

Students' Perspectives on Policy Solutions

When questioned about potential solutions, 90 percent of respondents supported aligning public examination schedules with the agricultural cycle, while 10 percent preferred introducing multiple examination attempts.

Table 09 shows policy solutions supported by respondents.

Policy	Supported by respondents
Aligning the academic calendar with the peak harvesting season	90%
Multiple examination attempts	10%

(Field survey, 2026)

Qualitative responses further highlight the severity of the issue. When asked how the overlapping impact affects you? Respondents from the mentioned Upazilas replied that “labor shortages persist during peak harvesting season, intensified by flood risks in haor areas, which makes it nearly impossible to allocate time for exams' preparation, resulting in mental stress and lower GPA”. And some participants from Derai and Shulla Upazila reported another burden of ‘staying at a place close to the exam center area and family responsibilities' when the center is situated in the Upazila town. They often come home when they find any gaps between exams to help their families in harvesting activities, further increasing psychological stress and reducing academic outcomes.

Notably, from the above discussion, the study identifies the following issues as unique in the context of Bangladesh.

- The academic calendar is divided into two stages, Half Yearly and Annual Exams, which intersect the planting and peak harvesting season (November and April).
- Scheduling of HSC and other public exams (national final and public universities semester exams) in the peak harvesting season.
- 72% of SSC and HSC students are from rural and haor areas (Alam, 2026).
- 76% of educational institutions are situated in rural regions (Ahmed T.T & Tarique, 2024).
- Different academic outcomes when exams are held outside the peak harvesting month.

Overall, the findings identify a clear and consistent mismatch: the overlap between peak harvesting season and public examination schedules creates significant psychological and academic disadvantages for rural students. The findings of the study validate key theoretical approaches, including Human Capital Theory, Opportunity Cost Theory, and Educational Inequality.

Furthermore, the evidence indicates that the issue is not merely individual but systemic, rooted in the misalignment between national education policies and the agricultural realities of rural Bangladesh. Addressing the issue requires standard policy interventions such as aligning public examination





schedules to consider the peak harvesting season, multiple assessment opportunities, and advanced agricultural machinery to minimize labor dependency.

Implications of the Study

Although this research is rooted in the context of rural Bangladesh, its implications extend to many agrarian and developing nations where seasonal labor demands remain high. Countries across South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Southeast Asia share similar socioeconomic structures, where students from farming households actively participate in agricultural activities during peak season (Ito & Shonchoy, 2025; Shonchoy, 2026).

In this context, a rigid and centralized system of examination sometimes fails to account for seasonal labor demands, leading to increased school absenteeism and lower academic performance. Therefore, the problem identified in this research highlights a broader structural issue in other developing countries.

In the long run, the issue recognized in this paper will play a pivotal role in shaping debates around equity in the education sector and inclusive development. As nations aim to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), addressing these structural mismatches will become considerably important.

Conclusion

This research indicates compelling empirical evidence that the overlap between agricultural season and public examination schedules constitutes a critical educational disparity in rural Bangladesh. Drawing on primary data from 400 students in the Haor regions of Derai, Shulla, Tahirpur, and Bishwamberpur upazilas, the findings show a consistent and alarming mismatch: during the peak harvesting period, students' ability to engage in exam preparation is highly constrained.

The data illustrate that a significant number (90%) of students are actively engaged in agricultural activities, with 80 percent reporting having no study time during the month of Baishakh and 100 percent acknowledging a decline in study hours. More strikingly, all respondents stated that examination schedules during this period negatively affect their academic outcomes, leading to less preparation for exams, lower academic outcomes, and heightened mental stress. These results not only validate key theoretical frameworks—Human Capital Theory and Theory of Opportunity Cost—but also show a deeper structural mismatch embedded within the education system.

The study further highlights that this is not an incidental issue but a systemic policy misalignment. The analysis of national examination schedules clearly identifies that major public examinations like SSC, HSC, university admission tests, honors examinations of public and national universities, and other recruitment tests are consistently conducted during peak harvesting months. In a country where a significant number of students are from farming backgrounds, rural and haor areas, such scheduling practices significantly disadvantage the very population that constitutes the lifeline of the nation's human capital.

Importantly, this study reframes that students from rural and haor areas are not underperforming due to a lack of capability or motivation; rather, they are constrained by a systematic disparity, as students perform well when exams are held outside the peak harvesting season. This misalignment basically perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage, reducing access to higher education and reinforcing long-term disparity.

In a broader sense, the findings of the study carry significant implications for development policy. In contexts of agrarian countries, education systems cannot operate in isolation from economic and seasonal realities. Avoiding this linkage undermines both academic equity and national development goals. As Bangladesh is eager to strengthen its human capital and gain inclusive progress, addressing this structural mismatch becomes not just necessary but urgent.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several policy recommendations are proposed to address the overlap between agricultural seasons and public examination schedules:





1. Alignment of Examination Schedules with the Agricultural Cycle.

The most immediate and effective solution is to align public examination schedules with the national agricultural cycle. Major public examinations like SSC, HSC, and Honors examinations of national and public universities should be scheduled outside peak harvesting periods, particularly mid-April to mid-May. This would significantly reduce the academic burden on rural students.

2. Introduction of Flexible Examination Systems

The government should consider introducing multiple examination attempts or flexible scheduling options. This would allow students who are unable to participate or perform well due to an unavoidable situation to retake exams without long-term academic penalties.

3. Strengthening and availability of Agricultural Tools

Investment in advance and climate-resilient agricultural technologies, and making them available in the Haor area by government initiative, can minimize dependency on manual labor. This would reduce the emergency for student involvement in their agricultural activities, allowing more time for education.

Declaration

I'm Md. Dilwar Hushen, the sole author of this article, hereby declares the following issues.

Usage of AI

Artificial intelligence-assisted language tools were used only for language editing and readability improvement. The author takes full responsibility for the content, interpretation, and conclusions of the study.

Founding

This research is self-funded, following past experiences of various challenges on the issue and recent difficulties of my students who are from the rural and haor areas.

Data Availably

Data are available to the author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this research.

Authorship and Credit

I'm the sole author of this manuscript. Data analysis, organizing, writing, and all related credits go to the author only.

Ethical Consideration

The research follows highly ethical standards. Confidentiality and anonymity in the study are highly maintained. Additionally, respondents are volunteers, anonymous, and they are allowed to withdraw at any stage of the survey.

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