Report of the Review Committee Established to Formulate a Vision for the Transformation of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education System

(with an Integrated Whole-of-Schooling Perspective)

Volume I

Vision for Learning Transformation
Setting Direction, Priorities, and Governing Commitments

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Review Committee established to formulate a Vision for the Transformation of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education System

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Note to the Reader

This report has been prepared by a Review Committee constituted by the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, under a formal mandate to articulate a future-oriented vision for the transformation of the secondary and higher secondary education system.

The report is issued in *two complementary volumes***.**

Volume I sets out the vision, guiding principles, and system-level direction for reform. It provides a diagnosis of the key challenges facing the education system and articulates a coherent framework to guide future policy, institutional reform, and investment decisions. While the Committee's formal mandate focuses on secondary and higher secondary education, the analysis in this volume adopts an integrated whole-of-schooling perspective, recognising that learning outcomes at the secondary level are shaped by conditions, incentives, and transitions across the full schooling cycle.

Volume II, titled the *National Learning Implementation Framework (NLIF)*, translates the vision articulated in Volume I into a practical governance and implementation framework. It sets out mechanisms for sequencing reform, ensuring accountability, managing system incentives, and supporting sustained improvement over time.

The two volumes are designed to be read together**,** but each may also be read independently, depending on the reader's role and interest. Volume I is intended primarily for policymakers, senior officials, and stakeholders concerned with strategic direction and reform priorities. Volume II is intended for officials and institutions responsible for policy design, delivery, monitoring, and implementation.

The Committee acknowledges that education reform is complex and context-dependent. The recommendations presented in this report are therefore framed as guiding principles and system-level design choices, rather than prescriptive operational instructions. Decisions regarding adoption, adaptation, and implementation rest with the appropriate authorities of the Government of Bangladesh

Executive Summary

The problem we face

Bangladesh has expanded schooling at scale. More children are enrolled. More classrooms have been built. More students pass public exams. These numbers were often used to show success. But learning did not keep pace.

Too many students move through school without learning to read fluently, without building basic maths skills, and without learning how to think, explain, or apply ideas. They pass grades and receive certificates, but many do not gain real knowledge or confidence. Certificates have grown. Learning has not.

This gap has been visible for years. Independent studies and household surveys repeatedly show weak learning, especially in mathematics and in tasks that require understanding rather than memorisation. These findings were known. Yet they did not change how success was judged. The system continued to focus on enrolment, infrastructure, exam participation, and pass rates. Learning remained secondary.

As long as these visible numbers improved, weak learning did not force action. Students were promoted. Certificates were issued. Examination results were kept stable through design and moderation. Over time, the gap between schooling and learning stopped being a warning sign. It became normal. The consequences are now urgent.

Bangladesh is nearing the end of its demographic dividend. The students currently in school will soon form the core of the workforce. If present conditions continue, many will enter adult life with certificates but without the skills needed for productive work, for adapting to change, or for continued learning. The cost will be felt in lower productivity, slower growth, and weak returns on decades of public investment in education.

There is also a deep social cost. When the system promotes students without ensuring learning, it gives families a false sense of security. Risk shifts from the state to households. Families who can afford it turn to coaching and private tutoring. Families who cannot are left behind. Inequality widens. Trust in public education weakens. Young people spend years in school, but too many leave without what they were promised.

In short: the system expanded, but it did not deliver learning.

Why weak learning became normal

Weak learning persisted because of how the education system is organised, governed, and judged. Across the system, success is measured through what is visible and easy to count. Enrolment numbers, buildings, exam participation, and pass rates are tracked closely. Institutions and officials are judged on these results. Learning quality is harder to measure, unevenly assessed, and rarely enforced. This imbalance shaped behaviour throughout the system.

The curriculum became crowded and unrealistic. Finishing the syllabus mattered more than ensuring understanding. Teachers were under pressure to cover content and prepare students for exams, even when many students were not ready. Teaching shifted toward memorisation, copying, and exam practice. These were predictable responses to the signals teachers received.

Assessment made the problem worse. Examinations carried high stakes, but their credibility was weak. When results did not align with expectations, they were adjusted through design choices, moderation, and interpretation. This reduced the risk of visible failure, but it weakened the meaning of exam results. Students could progress even when learning had not occurred.

Governance reinforced these patterns. Administrative systems focused on compliance, reporting, and procedural completion. Officials were rewarded for meeting targets and maintaining stability, not for confronting learning failure that could not be quickly resolved.

Families responded in rational ways. As trust in classroom learning and exam signals declined, households invested more in private tutoring to protect their children's prospects. This shifted responsibility for learning from the system to families and widened inequality.

Together, these forces produced a stable outcome. Weak learning did not trigger correction because the system was not organised to treat it as unacceptable. Instead, it was absorbed and normalised. Students progressed. Certificates were issued. Success continued to be reported.

Over time, the system learned how to function with weak learning.

What must change: five decisive shifts

The lesson of the past two decades is straightforward. Reform did not change outcomes because it did not change how the system works. As long as progression, certification, and visible results are rewarded more consistently than learning, weak learning will continue. Adding new programmes, training, or technology without changing these signals will reproduce the same results.

The problem is not how much reform has been attempted. It is the direction reform has taken. Five shifts are required.

1. Learning integrity must be the organising priority

Learning must have real consequences. Students should not move ahead unless they have learned what is essential. Progression must be based on mastery, not on age, coverage, or administrative discretion. When learning has not occurred, the system must slow down, adjust expectations, and correct course. Advancing students on paper cannot substitute for learning.

2. Curriculum must be reduced and disciplined

Removing overload must count as reform. A curriculum that cannot be taught cannot be learned. The system needs fewer objectives, clear sequencing, and strong focus on foundational skills, especially in the early grades. Too much content and too many symbolic activities reduce time for teaching. Making space for learning is not a loss. It is a necessary reform.

3. Assessment must regain credibility
Messages from the system must point in the same direction. Exams shape behaviour. When assessment signals are weak or unstable, defensive behaviour dominates. Curriculum, exams, supervision, and pathways must all reward the same thing: real learning. Alignment and trust must be rebuilt before stakes are raised.

4. Teachers must be given conditions that make learning possible
Information must reach classrooms in time to help. Protect classroom time. Clarify priorities. Reduce unnecessary administrative tasks. Teachers need quick, simple feedback about what students understand so they can adjust lessons while it still matters. Mentoring and practical support must be linked to actual teaching, not paperwork.

5. Governance must shift from procedural compliance to learning accountability
Responsibility must shift from families back to the system. Weak learning must trigger response, not accommodation. Authority and escalation pathways must be clear. Institutions must feel responsibility for learning, not only for reporting. When outcomes are poor, the response should come from the system through support and enforcement, not from households paying privately.

These five shifts mark the point where change becomes possible. They work because they change what the system allows and what it enforces, not because they rely on goodwill or motivation alone.

The North Star: what success should look like in lived experience

Success in this Vision is defined through what children and families see and feel in everyday life.

Early childhood and the first years of primary: Children arrive ready to participate. Classrooms are calm, predictable, and rich in language. The focus is on reading, writing, and basic number skills. These foundations are learned well, not rushed. Progress is checked often and simply. Confidence builds early.

Primary school: Learning grows through regular feedback, not rare high-stakes tests. Teachers know what students understand and adjust lessons as needed. Classroom time is protected for teaching. Parents receive clear messages about what their children are learning and how they can help.

Upper primary and lower secondary: Classrooms encourage explanation and reasoning. Students talk through their ideas, compare answers, and improve their thinking. Assessment helps learning rather than distorting it. Teachers can slow down when students need more time. Students feel safe to ask questions and make mistakes.

Secondary school: Assessment results are clear and trusted. Students understand where they stand and what effort leads to progress. Guidance is direct. Academic, technical, and vocational pathways are treated with equal seriousness. Choices are explained, not left unclear.

Families and communities: Families receive regular, simple information about learning. Private tutoring becomes optional rather than necessary. Trust grows when schools communicate clearly and when progress is visible. Learning becomes the central purpose of schooling.

This is the North Star. It keeps the system focused on lived experience, not only on institutional plans.

Why the next five years matter

The system will not fix itself. Weak learning has remained stable even as schooling expanded, money increased, and reforms were added. Without changes to incentives and enforcement, more activity will not lead to better learning.

The next five years are a narrow window. During this time, rules, routines, and expectations can still be reset before weak learning becomes firmly embedded in the workforce and the economy. Delay reduces options.

This Vision establishes the governing framework for reform. It defines what must be protected and what must change. Implementation sequencing and delivery will be guided by the National Learning Implementation Framework (NLIF). The purpose of the NLIF is to operationalise this Vision over time, not to reinterpret its core commitments.

Every reform proposal should be judged by one simple question:

> Does it strengthen real learning and everyday correction, or does it add activity without changing behaviour?

If it strengthens learning, it belongs. If it adds activity without changing behaviour, it should be rejected, even if it looks attractive or has external support.

What is at stake is not another reform cycle. It is whether Bangladesh's education system can become a system that learns, one that faces evidence honestly, corrects course when needed, and keeps learning at the centre.

Closing note

Bangladesh has achieved much by bringing children into school. The next phase is harder and more important. It is about what happens inside classrooms and inside the institutions that guide them.

The country now needs a system that values mastery, protects time for teaching, measures learning honestly, supports teachers to improve, and acts when learning is weak.

This path does not require many new programmes. It requires discipline.

- Protect the foundations.
- Align curriculum and exams.
- Make assessment credible.
- Support teachers.
- Enforce standards fairly.

- Return feedback to classrooms.
- Remove what gets in the way of learning.

If these steps are taken over the next five years, Bangladesh can move from schooling at scale to learning at scale. That is the promise families have been waiting for. That is the promise this Vision aims to keep.

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Chapter 1. Purpose and frame

Bangladesh's education system is failing its children. For decades, schooling expanded while learning stagnated. Classrooms multiplied, enrolment figures climbed, and certificates were issued in ever greater numbers. These visible signs of progress were repeatedly used to claim success. Yet beneath them, a more damaging reality took hold. Millions of children spent years in school without learning to read fluently, reason clearly, or develop the confidence needed to navigate adult life. This is not a marginal problem at the edges of the system. It is the defining failure at its core.

This Vision begins from a position of moral urgency. A society that allows children to pass through its education system without learning is not merely inefficient. It is unjust. It wastes human potential, deepens inequality, and transfers the cost of failure onto families who did everything they were asked to do. Schooling was delivered. Learning was not.

1.1 Why this Vision exists

Bangladesh now sits near the bottom of global learning outcomes among countries that have achieved near-universal schooling. This is not because teachers did not work hard, parents did not care, or children lacked ability. It is because learning was never treated as the central test of success.

For many years, the system prioritised expansion, compliance, and visible outputs. Enrolment, infrastructure, and headline examination results mattered. Learning outcomes, especially for children who struggled early or fell behind quietly, mattered far less. Evidence of weak mastery accumulated across assessments, surveys, and classroom observations. It was documented, discussed, and acknowledged. Yet it rarely altered what the system enforced or what it ignored.

The pandemic did not create this crisis. It exposed it. When schools closed, many children lacked the foundations needed to recover without major adjustment. When schools reopened, curricula resumed largely unchanged. The system moved forward. The children who had fallen behind did not.

Bangladesh has now reached a point where denial is no longer possible. The demographic dividend is narrowing. The labour market is unforgiving. Social trust is fragile. Continuing to produce cohorts of young people without strong literacy, numeracy, and reasoning skills is no longer just an education problem. It is a national risk. This Vision exists because there is no second chance at this.

The changes required cannot be achieved within a single plan period or political term. This Vision therefore takes a generational view of reform, recognising that learning foundations established today shape outcomes over the next ten to fifteen years. It defines what must hold steady over that period, while implementation pace and sequencing are governed through the NLIF.

1.2 What this Vision covers and why it matters

This Vision focuses on learning from pre-primary through the end of secondary education. These years determine whether a child acquires the foundations that make everything else possible. When these foundations are weak, no later reform can fully compensate.

The Vision covers general education, madrasa education, English-medium schooling, and technical and vocational pathways. It does so not to treat them as equivalent by assumption, but to confront the reality that different streams now offer very different learning conditions and very different futures.

Higher education and adult learning matter deeply. But without strong foundations, they become sorting mechanisms rather than engines of opportunity. This Vision addresses the part of the system where failure is most damaging and where reform still has the power to change life trajectories.

1.3 What this Vision means by learning

Throughout this report, learning is not treated as the accumulation of content, the reproduction of information, or the successful navigation of examinations. Learning is understood as the gradual development of capability, judgement, and agency that allows a child to participate meaningfully in society.

At its core, learning means being able to read with understanding, reason with numbers, communicate ideas, listen to others, ask questions, and apply knowledge to unfamiliar situations. It includes the ability to think, explain, reflect, and revise one's understanding over time. These capacities are not abstract ideals. They are the foundations of personal dignity, economic participation, and civic life.

This Vision is grounded in a humanistic understanding of education. Children are not instruments for economic growth, nor are they vessels for rote transmission. Education serves society best when it enables individuals to develop confidence, curiosity, self-respect, and the ability to engage with difference, complexity, and change.

Culture, language, and belief shape how learning is expressed and valued. This Vision respects that diversity, but it does not prescribe moral doctrine or cultural hierarchy. Its concern is whether the education system equips young people with the intellectual and practical capacities needed to navigate adult life with agency and responsibility.

Learning, as used in this report, therefore refers to what learners can actually do with what they know. Where schooling advances without developing these capabilities, learning has not occurred, regardless of enrolment, coverage, or certification.

1.4 The governing failure this Vision confronts

This Vision does not assume that the system is doing its best and merely needs refinement. It begins from a harder truth. Systems behave exactly as they are set up to behave.

In Bangladesh, the education system rewarded compliance over competence, reporting over results, and credential expansion over learning integrity. Teachers were monitored but rarely supported. Schools were inspected but seldom empowered. Officials were assessed on completing processes rather than improving outcomes. Parents were told to trust the system, even as they paid privately to protect their children from its weaknesses.

In such conditions, behaviour adapted predictably. When effort was disconnected from results, motivation drained away. When weak performance carried no consequence, it spread. When appearances mattered more than substance, reporting replaced problem-solving and certificates replaced capability.

This Vision therefore does not begin with programmes or pilots. It begins with how the system actually works. It asks what people respond to, what they avoid, and what they learn to prioritise in their daily decisions. It treats reform as a question of behaviour and consequence, not aspiration.

1.5 A break from comfortable narratives

For too long, education reform in Bangladesh was framed to preserve comfort rather than confront failure.

This Vision makes a different choice. It states plainly that the system failed to deliver learning at scale, and that this failure persisted because it was tolerated. This is not about naming villains. It is about naming governing logics. A system that consistently produces weak learning outcomes is not unlucky. It is operating as it has been allowed to operate. Facing this reality is not pessimism. It is the starting point for serious change.

1.6 What this Vision demands instead

This Vision focuses on changing the everyday signals the system sends.[1] It asks whether teachers are supported to succeed rather than merely supervised. Whether students experience early success or repeated failure. Whether information about learning reaches classrooms in time to matter. Whether schools and local officials are trusted to solve problems or simply expected to report them. Whether curriculum, assessment, and pathways reinforce the same priorities or pull in different directions.

Change does not come from exhortation. It comes when effort is recognised, support is real, feedback leads to adjustment, and failure is neither hidden nor ignored.

[1] In this document, *system signals* refer to the rules, routines, and incentives through which the education system communicates what matters in practice. They are not directives or policy statements. Signals shape behaviour by default — through curriculum scope, assessment formats, instructional time, progression rules, reporting requirements, and the distribution of discretion and support — even in the absence of instruction or directives.

Education systems improve only when they are required to confront evidence, correct course, and respond early to signs of failure. In Bangladesh, information has been collected at scale for years, but it has rarely triggered action. Data travelled upward. Learning did not travel back.

This Vision insists that information must lead somewhere. When learning is weak, something must change. When support fails, it must be strengthened. When rules are ignored, that must matter. Not through arbitrary punishment, but through clear expectations, visible follow-through, and consequences that are predictable rather than selective.

Finally, this Vision treats learning failure as a public responsibility, not a private burden. When parents must pay to secure basic learning, the system has already failed. The task ahead is not to demand more effort from teachers or more patience from families. It is to rebuild a system where effort has meaning, support arrives before failure hardens, information is used rather than filed away, and learning is no longer optional. That is the standard this Vision sets.

1.7 How to read this document

This Vision is structured to move from evidence, to system diagnosis, to design principles, and finally to political and institutional commitments. Each part plays a distinct role.

The *Executive Summary* sets out the problem, the governing diagnosis, the five decisive shifts required, and the lived experience the system must deliver. For many readers, this will be sufficient. It is designed to stand alone.

Chapter 2 documents the state of learning in Bangladesh. It draws on national assessments, household surveys, administrative data, and system reviews to show how weak learning has persisted despite expansion. The full evidentiary record supporting this chapter is provided in Appendix A.

Chapter 3 explains why learning has not improved. It shifts from description to system analysis, setting out the low-learning equilibrium, the dominance of non-learning signals, and why well-intentioned initiatives fail when system incentives remain unchanged. Appendix B should be read alongside this chapter. It provides the analytical framework for understanding how learning dynamics, system domains, and feedback loops interact, and why sequencing and leverage matter.

Chapter 4 reframes success from the perspective of children and families. It describes what the learning journey should look like if the system were functioning as intended, and why coherence across stages matters.

Chapters 5 and 6 translate this learning journey into system design. Chapter 5 addresses curriculum, assessment, and progression as system signals. Chapter 6 sets out what professional accountability and support for teachers must look like under conditions of clarity and coherence.

Chapter 7 examines the enabling systems and political realities that determine whether coherence can be sustained once enforcement begins, including governance, incentives, finance, information, and public narrative.

Chapter 8 establishes the implementation logic and the non-negotiables that protect the reform from dilution, layering, or retreat. It defines what phasing is allowed to mean and what cannot be reopened.

Chapter 9 addresses the conditions that surround learning, including health, equity, technology, and pathways. These are treated not as parallel agendas, but as system conditions whose role is to stabilise learning effort and protect coherence.

Chapter 10 sets out how the system learns and adapts without losing authority or credibility. It defines how experimentation, evidence, and course correction can occur within fixed commitments.

Chapter 11 concludes by articulating the national compact required for this Vision to hold. It specifies what the system is asking of teachers, families, and institutions, what the state commits in return, and where the line will not be crossed.

This Vision establishes the governing framework for education reform. It defines direction, priorities, and non-negotiable commitments. It does not prescribe programmes, delivery mechanisms, or implementation choices. Those decisions belong to the NLIF, which is designed to translate this governing logic into sequenced action over time without altering, diluting, or reopening the commitments set out here.

Chapter 2. The state of learning in Bangladesh

This chapter

- establishes that Bangladesh expanded schooling and credentials at scale without achieving corresponding gains in learning.
- shows that learning failure begins early, compounds over time, and is rarely corrected once students fall behind.
- demonstrates how assessment practices enabled credential expansion while eroding the credibility of learning signals.
- documents how fragmented governance, weak enforcement, and misaligned incentives normalised low learning outcomes.
- shows how underinvestment and inefficient spending shifted the cost of learning failure onto households through private tutoring.
- demonstrates how inequality is reproduced through poverty, gender, disability, language, and stratified education streams.
- concludes that weak learning is not accidental or temporary, but the predictable result of system choices that prioritised expansion and appearance over learning integrity.

For more than two decades, Bangladesh expanded schooling at extraordinary scale. New classrooms were built across the country, enrolment rose steadily, and national programmes reached communities that had long been excluded from formal education. These achievements were highly visible and frequently cited as evidence that the system was on the right path. But for millions of children, schooling did not result in learning.

This chapter makes a difficult claim, grounded in evidence and long visible to those working inside the system. Bangladesh did not merely struggle to improve learning outcomes. Over time, the education system did not merely fail to improve learning outcomes. It actively produced and defended an equilibrium in which weak learning could persist alongside expanding credentials and visible success. This equilibrium was sustained through policy choices, incentive structures, and enforcement practices that prioritised control, progression, and political signalling over the integrity of learning.

Appendix A documents the full diagnostic record behind this chapter, including quantitative evidence from national assessments, household surveys, and administrative systems spanning multiple years. This chapter does not rehearse that evidence in detail. It draws out what it means. Each section presented in this chapter has an accompanying section in the appendix.

2.1 Learning foundations, classroom practice, and progression

Learning failure in Bangladesh begins early and compounds over time. Around 80 percent of children enter Grade 1 without consistent exposure to structured early learning, language-rich interaction, or age-appropriate cognitive development. Early childhood provision exists, but coverage and quality remain uneven relative to the size of the cohort. These risks have been identified repeatedly in studies, feasibility assessments, and national reviews. They were known, acknowledged, and left unresolved at scale.

Primary schools therefore inherit classrooms marked by wide variation in readiness. Yet the system does not adapt to this reality. Repeated national assessments show that by the end of primary school, fewer than half of students demonstrate grade-level proficiency in Bangla, and only around one-third do so in mathematics. These outcomes have remained largely unchanged across successive assessment cycles, pointing to a structural failure rather than a temporary disruption.

Instead of closing learning gaps, the system carries them forward. As students move into lower secondary education, curriculum demands increase sharply in abstraction and pace. Students are expected to reason, apply concepts, and work independently without having mastered the foundational skills required to do so. Many cannot cope. By the end of secondary school, more than 30 per cent of students have dropped out, with the steepest losses occurring between Grades 8 and 10.

Classroom practice reinforces these patterns. Teaching is dominated by copying, recall, and pressure to complete the syllabus. Opportunities for explanation, feedback, and problem-solving are limited. Effective instructional time is far lower than policy frameworks assume, eroded by teacher absence, administrative demands, large class sizes, and multi-grade teaching. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, curricula were largely reinstated without systematic reprioritisation, despite clear evidence of learning loss.

Students therefore progress through grades without learning. Once they fall behind, the system offers little chance of recovery.

2.2 Assessment, credentials, and learning signals

Assessment is the organising force of Bangladesh's education system. It determines progression, status, and access to opportunity. It shapes how teachers teach, how students study, and how families make decisions about time and money. Yet assessment signals no longer reliably represent learning.

Independent assessments show modest levels of mastery, particularly in mathematics. At the same time, public examination outcomes expanded rapidly over many years. Over the past two decades, pass rates in public examinations more than doubled, while independently measured learning levels remained low. This divergence hollowed out the meaning of credentials and weakened their value as indicators of competence.

When marking stringency or enforcement practices changed, examination results shifted dramatically within a single year. Such volatility cannot plausibly reflect changes in teaching quality or student ability. Attempts to alter assessment and curriculum regimes have not failed because they were absent, but because they were contested. Reforms that reduced high-stakes examinations or shifted toward competency-based approaches disrupted established interests, including political narratives, coaching markets, and familiar parental expectations. These reforms triggered backlash through media, partisan mobilisation, and claims of declining standards, leading to partial reversal or reversion. In this sense, assessment dominance was not accidental.

Concerns about examination integrity further weakened trust. Question leakage, automatic pass provisions, and organised malpractice were repeatedly acknowledged in official documents

and policy discussions. These were known vulnerabilities in a high-stakes system that prioritised outcomes over credibility.

Families responded rationally to this uncertainty. When grades could no longer be trusted as signals of learning, households treated examinations as high-risk contests. Private tutoring and coaching expanded rapidly, functioning as a parallel system for managing risk. Coaching focused narrowly on anticipated questions, formats, and marking schemes, reinforcing memorisation and narrowing learning. Assessment ceased to reward mastery. It rewarded access, risk management, and endurance.

2.3 Governance failures, incentives, and resource leakages

The failure to convert schooling into learning is inseparable from governance. Authority is fragmented across ministries, directorates, and boards with overlapping but incomplete mandates. Curriculum, assessment, teacher management, supervision, and financing operate through parallel institutional chains that rarely converge on classroom learning. This fragmentation diffuses responsibility and weakens coherence.

Accountability flows upward through reports and checklists rather than outward to communities or peers. District and upazila levels function primarily as administrative conduits rather than empowered problem-solving tiers. Supervision focuses on compliance rather than instructional improvement. Information is generated at scale, but consequences rarely follow.

Enforcement is selective and uneven. Rules exist and can be applied stringently when outcomes are politically salient, but are relaxed or inconsistently enforced when learning integrity conflicts with progression targets, institutional convenience, or vested interests. Promotion and career progression are largely disconnected from instructional quality or student learning. In such an environment, reduced effort and informal practices become rational responses rather than aberrations.

Empirical studies document enrolment inflation, diversion of school funds, and weak verification at school level. These are not isolated deviations. They are stable features of a system where discretion is high and accountability is low.

Political incentives reinforced this equilibrium. Visible outputs such as enrolment expansion, infrastructure delivery, and headline examination results were rewarded. Learning outcomes were not. This reflected repeated choices about what would be measured, what would be enforced, and what would be allowed to persist.

2.4 Education financing, expenditure efficiency, and cost shifting

Chronic underinvestment and inefficient use of resources further constrain learning in ways that are both structural and consequential. Public spending on education has remained low for decades relative to national ambition, demographic pressure, and the demands placed on schools. Where spending does occur, it is heavily absorbed by salaries and routine administrative costs, leaving limited fiscal space for remediation, instructional support, teacher coaching, or school-level problem-solving.

This is not simply a question of how much is spent, but how spending behaves. Weak verification, fragmented accountability, and limited linkage between finance and learning

outcomes mean that additional resources do not reliably translate into improved instruction. Funds flow, but their impact dissipates before reaching classrooms in ways that matter for struggling students, while simultaneously sustaining administrative routines, informal extraction, and private markets that benefit from weak public delivery.

When public provision fails to deliver learning, households absorb the cost. Household surveys show that private tutoring is now the single largest component of education spending for many families. For many households, this is no longer a discretionary supplement. It is the price of survival in an assessment system whose signals cannot be trusted. Parents pay not to get ahead, but to avoid falling behind.

This cost shifting is deeply inequitable. Families with resources can buy protection against weak instruction and volatile examinations. Families without resources bear the full consequences of system failure. Over time, public education shifts from a leveller of opportunity to a sorting mechanism that mirrors household wealth.

2.5 Equity and inclusion

The system does not fail evenly. Poverty shapes attendance stability, learning outcomes, and progression at every stage of schooling. Children from low-income households are more likely to attend irregularly, fall behind early, and drop out when academic demands increase. Geographic disadvantage compounds these risks, particularly in rural areas, char regions, and urban informal settlements.

Girls experience sharp dropout during adolescence, despite decades of policy attention. Early marriage, safety concerns, household responsibilities, and social expectations converge at the point where academic pressure intensifies and household costs rise. Stipends have supported enrolment, but they have not offset weak learning, examination risk, or the absence of credible pathways beyond schooling.

Children with disabilities remain structurally excluded. Inaccessible infrastructure, limited specialist support, and inadequate teacher preparation prevent meaningful inclusion. Linguistic minority children face a different barrier. They are expected to master complex concepts in languages they do not speak at home, undermining comprehension, confidence, and participation from the earliest grades.

These disadvantages accumulate. Early gaps become entrenched exclusions. By the time students leave the system, outcomes reflect unequal exposure to learning conditions over time rather than effort or potential.

2.6 Education streams and stratification

Bangladesh’s parallel education streams operate not as equivalent routes, but as stratified pathways with unequal learning conditions and unequal futures.

Differences in curriculum balance, teacher quality, assessment regimes, and access to supplementary learning translate into sharply different preparation for higher education and employment. English-medium pathways concentrate advantage through smaller classes, greater resources, and stronger alignment with competitive examinations. General and madrasa streams operate under tighter constraints, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Technical and vocational education remains weakly connected to upward mobility and is often perceived as a terminal pathway.

Mobility between streams is limited in practice. Early placement matters, and later transitions are constrained by curricular mismatches, assessment barriers, and institutional gatekeeping. Private tutoring amplifies these divides, allowing some students to compensate for weak provision while others cannot.

The result is a system that reproduces inequality while claiming neutrality. Credentials appear formally equivalent, but their social and economic value diverges sharply. Opportunity is shaped less by aspiration or ability than by pathway and purchasing power.

2.7 What this evidence means

The evidence across learning outcomes, assessment behaviour, governance arrangements, financing patterns, and household responses leads to an unavoidable conclusion.

Weak learning outcomes in Bangladesh are not the result of ignorance, bad luck, or recent shocks. They reflect a system that repeatedly chose expansion over mastery, credentials over credibility, and visible success over learning integrity. These choices were sustained over time, reinforced by political incentives, institutional self-protection, and economic interests that benefited from credential expansion without learning enforcement.

Underperformance was predictable. It persisted because it was politically and administratively acceptable. The system delivered enrolment, infrastructure, and certificates. It did not consistently deliver learning.

For millions of children, this has meant years spent in classrooms without acquiring the skills needed to read with confidence, reason effectively, or participate fully in society. The cost is borne in constrained lives, narrowed choices, and foreclosed futures.

Bangladesh now faces a narrowing window to convert its demographic opportunity into a learning dividend. Appendix A documents the evidence in full. This Vision responds to it.

The question is no longer whether the problems are known. The question is whether the system is willing to act differently, and to accept the political, institutional, and moral consequences of doing so.

Chapter 3. Why learning does not improve: the system problem

This chapter

- shows that weak learning persists because the education system is able to function without learning improvement.
- explains how incentives, accountability, and assessment reward compliance, coverage, and risk avoidance rather than mastery.
- demonstrates that teachers, officials, and households respond rationally to these signals, even when outcomes are poor.
- shows why reforms added on top of existing structures are absorbed, diluted, or reversed rather than changing behaviour.
- explains that learning does not improve when exposing failure is risky and maintaining appearances is safer.
- concludes that learning will not improve through more initiatives alone, but only when system rules, signals, and consequences change.
- establishes that sequencing matters, because some changes must come first to make improvement possible.

The patterns described in Chapter 2 are not a collection of unrelated failures. They reflect the predictable behaviour of a complex system operating under stable but poor incentives, constraints, and signals over time. When learning does not determine progression, status, or institutional survival, effort shifts elsewhere. When information carries no consequence, it ceases to guide behaviour. When risk is punished and compliance is rewarded, adaptation slows and ineffective routines harden.

This chapter explains why learning outcomes in Bangladesh have remained weak despite repeated initiatives, policy announcements, and technical adjustments. The problem is not that solutions were unknown or expertise was unavailable. It is that the education system has been actively shaped in ways that make genuine learning improvement difficult, costly, and politically inconvenient to pursue. Over time, the system came to privilege visible expansion, controllable metrics, and administrative safety over learning integrity.

In such a system, reform fails because it threatens established incentives, routines, and interests. Initiatives are introduced as additions rather than disruptions. They coexist with unchanged assessment regimes, accountability structures, and political incentives, and are therefore absorbed, neutralised, or reversed. What persists is a stable low-learning equilibrium that is actively maintained because changing it is harder, riskier, and less rewarding than preserving it.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it explains what kind of system the education sector has become. Second, it shows how the low-learning equilibrium is sustained and defended in practice. Third, it sets out what it means to change a system before adding further initiatives. Appendix B presents the technical system logic underpinning this analysis. This chapter focuses on what that logic means in plain terms.

3.1 What kind of system we are dealing with

Education is not a collection of independent parts. It is a system made up of classrooms, examinations, curricula, financing rules, supervision arrangements, political incentives, labour markets, households, and social norms. These elements interact continuously. What happens in one part of the system shapes behaviour elsewhere, often with delays that make cause and effect difficult to see.

Because of this interdependence, changing one component in isolation rarely changes outcomes. New curricula are filtered through existing examinations. Teacher training is shaped by classroom conditions, inspection practices, and social expectations. Data systems influence behaviour only if they carry consequences. Household decisions respond to assessment signals, not to policy intent.

Outcomes are therefore not the sum of individual effort or goodwill. They are the product of how the system behaves as a whole. When incentives, risks, and rewards point in one direction, effort flows that way, regardless of stated goals. This is why education systems can appear busy and reform-active while remaining stuck. Activity continues, but learning does not improve.

This reality matters because it explains why long lists of initiatives, even when they appear sensible on paper, rarely achieve their intended purpose. In a system whose structure blocks learning improvement, programmes struggle to take root. In some cases, initiatives do harm by creating new ways to perform compliance without changing practice.

3.2 The low-learning equilibrium

Bangladesh's education system operates in a low-learning equilibrium. Weak learning outcomes are not temporary deviations, implementation gaps, or short-term shocks. They are the system's normal state.

An equilibrium is defined by what a system reliably produces and sustains. In this case, the education system consistently delivers:

- high enrolment and visible access,
- widespread certification and examination participation,
- administratively manageable performance indicators,
- politically usable claims of progress.

At the same time, it consistently fails to deliver:

- secure foundational learning,
- credible assessment of mastery,
- timely correction when students fall behind,
- sustained instructional improvement inside classrooms.

This combination is not accidental. The system has stabilised around outputs that are visible, controllable, and politically useful, while treating learning as an implicit by-product rather than a binding requirement. As long as certificates can be issued, grades can be managed, and progression can continue, the system remains functional in administrative and political terms, even when learning is weak.

What makes this an equilibrium is that changing it is harder than maintaining it. Improving learning would require confronting assessment credibility, protecting instructional time, enforcing standards that expose failure, and disrupting entrenched routines and interests.

This equilibrium is reproduced through everyday decisions made by administrators, teachers, political actors, and households, each responding rationally to the incentives, risks, and constraints they face. The result is not conspiracy, but a system in which disturbing the status quo is consistently more costly than preserving it.

3.2.1 Administrative survival and risk avoidance

Within the bureaucracy, survival depends on compliance rather than problem solving. Reporting requirements are clear. Expectations around learning improvement are diffuse and weakly enforced. Speaking plainly about failure carries risk, while managing indicators is safer.

In this environment, maintaining acceptable numbers becomes more important than confronting uncomfortable truths. Learning problems are acknowledged in principle, but rarely pursued to the point where they disrupt routines or expose responsibility. Managing appearances becomes rational behaviour.

3.2.2 Classroom reality

Teachers operate under intense pressure to complete syllabi, prepare students for examinations, and conform to established norms. Class sizes are large. Instructional time is constrained. Deviating from the expected pace or approach carries social and professional cost.

A teacher who slows down to ensure understanding risks being labelled ineffective or uncooperative. A teacher who experiments risks inspection queries, parental complaints, or informal sanction. Doing the right thing is often harder, riskier, and less rewarded than doing what has always been done.

3.2.3 Assessment dominance and distorted signalling

Assessment dominates the system. Examinations determine progression, status, and opportunity. Yet assessment practices have become weakly connected to learning.

High pass rates and grade inflation are politically useful. When credibility falters, volatility is tolerated if headline stability can be restored. This creates space for administrative discretion and further undermines trust in credentials.

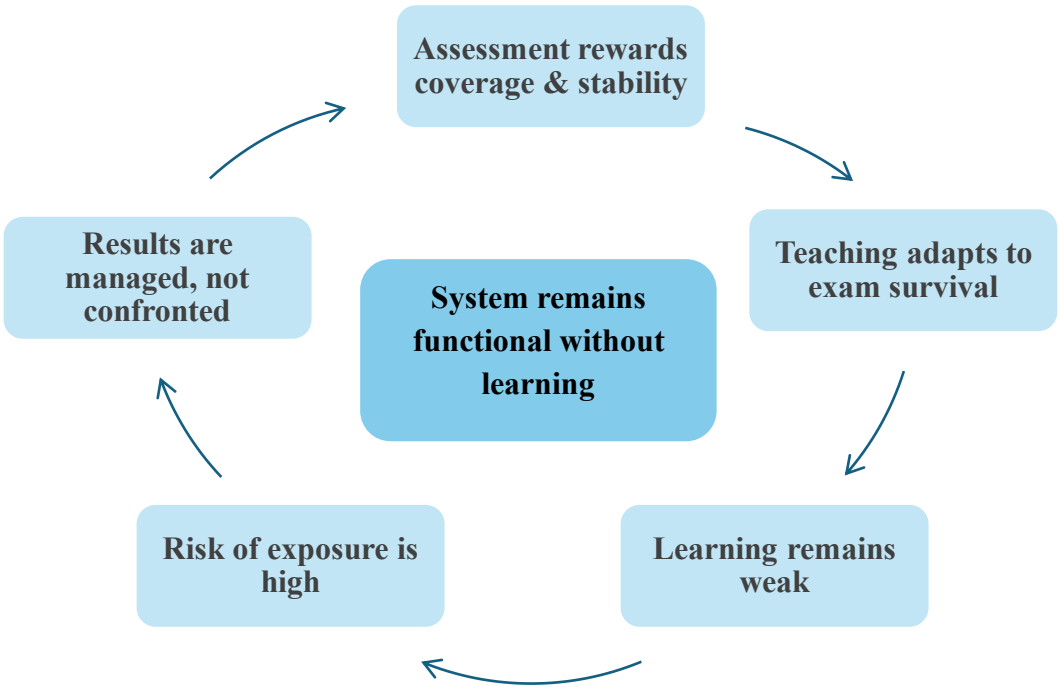
When assessment rewards coverage and risk management rather than mastery, actors respond accordingly. Teaching narrows. Learning becomes strategic. Reform efforts that challenge this logic face resistance, both overt and subtle.

3.2.4 Household adaptation

Families respond rationally to uncertainty. When grades cannot be trusted, households turn to private tutoring and coaching to manage risk. Private expenditure compensates for system weakness.

This adaptation stabilises the equilibrium. Families protect their children individually rather than demanding collective change. Inequality widens, but the system remains politically manageable. No single actor causes the problem. But many actors have reasons not to disturb it.

Figure 3.1. The low-learning equilibrium



Notes: This diagram illustrates how assessment, incentives, and risk management interact to produce a stable system in which weak learning persists without triggering correction. The equilibrium is not the result of individual failure, but of system signals that reward stability and absorb exposure rather than confronting learning gaps.

3.3 Why doing the right things in a bad system does not yield better outcomes

Bangladesh has not experienced a simple story of well-designed reforms that failed to scale. Some initiatives were technically sound but poorly matched to the realities of a low-trust, politicised system. Others prioritised visibility, control, or narrative management over learning. Still others actively weakened the learning environment by embedding politicisation, eroding merit norms, and enabling rent-seeking around curriculum, recruitment, and procurement.

A recurring pattern has been the substitution of appearance for change. When the system needed to confront assessment credibility, instructional time, teacher effort, and accountability, it often chose safer alternatives: slogans, revised formats, pilots, platforms, trainings, or announcements. These actions created movement without disruption. Incentives remained intact while progress was signalled.

This pattern was reinforced by the selective importation of international best practice. Models developed in high-trust, high-capacity contexts were transplanted into a system characterised by fragmented authority and politicised implementation. Rather than transforming practice, these reforms were filtered through existing routines. Compliance replaced commitment. Documentation replaced learning.

More seriously, some system choices actively degraded the learning environment. Politicised curriculum content narrowed classroom space and weakened trust. Textbook development and procurement became channels for patronage, producing poor materials and weak instructional value. Politicised recruitment and postings eroded professional norms, signalling that effort was optional and accountability selective. Instructional time was routinely sacrificed to administrative and political visibility, demonstrating that symbolism mattered more than mastery.

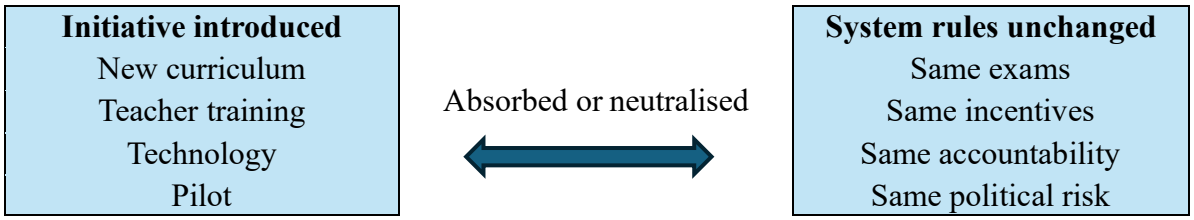
Taken together, these practices reinforced the low-learning equilibrium by making credible assessment, professional effort, and instructional integrity politically and administratively costly.

In this environment, even helpful interventions struggle to survive. Teachers who slow down risk sanction. Headteachers who protect learning time risk conflict. Officials who push for assessment credibility risk backlash if results fall. Learning improvement becomes personally risky.

This explains why initiative stacking produces little change. New curriculum language combined with unchanged examinations produces no change. Training without follow-through produces no change. Monitoring without consequence produces no change. In some cases, reforms deepen the equilibrium by expanding the repertoire of compliance.

The lesson is not that reform is impossible. It is that the system must change before reforms can work, and that some entrenched practices must be confronted directly rather than bypassed.

Figure 3.2 Why initiatives fail to change outcomes



Notes: When reforms are introduced without altering examinations, incentives, accountability, or political risk, they are absorbed into existing routines. Activity increases, but behaviour does not change. Learning outcomes therefore remain largely unchanged.

3.4 Accountability and the dominance of non-learning signals

Accountability for learning is largely absent from Bangladesh's education system. What exists instead is strong accountability for reporting, procedural compliance, and the maintenance of politically acceptable indicators.

Accountability here does not mean punishment or inspection. It means that learning outcomes carry consequence. Expectations are clear, signals are observable, and failure to improve triggers response rather than accommodation.

In Bangladesh, the strongest consequences attach to non-learning objectives. Schools are judged on enrolment, coverage, examination participation, and compliance. Officials are rewarded for managing processes and avoiding disruption. Political actors benefit from stable headline indicators. None of these require learning to improve.

As a result, learning does not dominate decision-making. It consistently loses to signals that are more visible, controllable, and less risky. Data on learning accumulates but rarely compels action. Supervision focuses on documentation rather than instruction. The low-learning equilibrium persists because accountability is misdirected. The system enforces the wrong things.

3.5 Changing a system, not adding initiatives

Because accountability is misaligned, adding initiatives does not change outcomes. New programmes enter a system whose incentives, risks, and routines remain intact. They are interpreted, reshaped, or neutralised to fit existing patterns of behaviour.

Signals must change before behaviour can change. When learning carries consequence, effort follows. When it does not, effort flows toward safer substitutes such as compliance, coverage, and risk management. System change therefore requires altering the conditions under which everyday decisions are made.

Credibility must be restored before stakes are raised. Instructional time and professional norms must be protected before new expectations are imposed. Consequences for learning must be visible and predictable, so that improvement becomes safer than avoidance.

Early gains matter because they change beliefs about whether effort leads to results. Beliefs shape behaviour, and behaviour stabilises systems. This is why sequencing is not a technical preference but a structural necessity. Some changes must come first to make others possible.

Taken together, the diagnosis in this chapter shows that learning remains fragile not because of a lack of effort or activity, but because the system repeatedly weakens the conditions under which learning can accumulate. Effort is risky. Feedback is weak or delayed. Trust is thin. Signals pull in different directions. Readiness is uneven and unaddressed. These are not separate problems. They are recurring features of how the system currently behaves.

Appendix B sets out the technical system logic underpinning this argument. What matters here is the implication: learning will not improve until the system is reshaped so that these core conditions consistently support, rather than undermine, everyday learning

3.6 From system diagnosis to learning dynamics

The purpose of this chapter has been diagnostic. It has shown why learning does not improve in Bangladesh despite repeated reform efforts, and how incentives, accountability structures, assessment practices, and political pressures combine to stabilise a low-learning equilibrium.

That diagnosis also reveals something else. Across different levels of the system, the same dynamics appear again and again. When learning falters, it is because students are not ready to engage, effort is not rewarded, feedback arrives too late or not at all, trust is weak, or signals are misaligned. When learning improves, even temporarily, it is because these conditions briefly move in the right direction.

This observation matters because it clarifies the direction of change. Learning will not improve through additional programmes layered onto existing structures. It will improve only when the system is reshaped so that readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and alignment consistently support learning in everyday practice.

That shift cannot begin with institutions alone. Education systems reproduce themselves through lived experience. What teachers do each day, how students experience effort and correction, what parents can see and trust, and whether learning appears to lead somewhere all determine whether incentives change in practice.

For this reason, the next chapter changes perspective. Rather than extending the system diagnosis, it steps inside the learning journey itself. It asks what a Bangladeshi child and family should experience, year by year, if these core dynamics were working in favour of learning rather than against it.

Chapter 4 therefore does not present reforms, programmes, or mechanisms. It presents the learning experience that the system must be capable of producing before technical change can take hold. The chapters that follow then return to institutions, accountability, and implementation, showing how that experience can be made possible

Chapter 4. The Learning Journey: What a Child and Family Should Experience if the System Worked

This chapter

- reframes education from institutional stages to a continuous learning journey experienced by children and families.
- describes what learning should feel like, year by year, if the system worked as intended.
- shows how learning accumulates when readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and alignment are present.
- demonstrates how early foundations determine whether later stages deepen learning or compound loss.
- illustrates how classrooms change when learning time is protected and feedback is immediate and safe.
- clarifies what families should see, understand, and trust at each stage of schooling.
- establishes the lived experience that governance and reform must make normal, not exceptional.

This chapter asks a simple but demanding question: what should a Bangladeshi child and their family be able to expect, year by year, if the education system worked as intended?

Not in policy language, and not from the perspective of institutions, but in lived experience. What learning should feel like on an ordinary school day. What support should be visible. What signals should be clear. What routines should be reliable.

Chapter 3 showed why the current system fails to deliver this experience. It traced how incentives, accountability structures, assessment practices, and political pressures repeatedly weaken the conditions under which learning can accumulate. Across these failures, five dynamics consistently emerged as decisive: readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and alignment.

This chapter takes those dynamics seriously and re-expresses them from the learner's point of view. It describes education as a learning journey rather than a sequence of disconnected stages. Skills, confidence, identity, and aspiration accumulate over time. When early foundations are secure, later learning becomes possible. When they are weak, each transition becomes a point of loss.

What follows is not a list of reforms or initiatives. It is a coherent picture of the learning experience the system must be capable of delivering if learning is to become cumulative rather than fragile. The chapters that follow then return to the question of how institutions, governance, and implementation must change to make that journey real.

4.1 Early Childhood and Readiness: Arriving Ready to Learn

Learning does not begin on the first day of Grade 1. Children arrive in classrooms with very different levels of language exposure, confidence, health, emotional regulation, and familiarity

with structured interaction. These differences are not random. They reflect household conditions, nutrition, access to early learning, and whether children have previously experienced adults responding to their curiosity.

When the system ignores these differences, inequality hardens immediately. Children who struggle early learn that school is a place of confusion and correction rather than discovery. Teachers, facing wide variation and fixed pacing expectations, move on. Gaps widen quietly and persist.

A learning-oriented system treats early childhood not as optional preparation, but as a core readiness function. Its purpose is not acceleration or early formal instruction. Its purpose is to ensure that children arrive in Grade 1 able to participate: to listen, speak, count, play, follow routines, and see themselves as learners.

What readiness means in practice

Readiness is not a checklist of discrete skills. It is a state of participation. Children who are ready can sit in a group, take turns, ask questions, and persist when something is difficult. They recognise sounds and symbols, but more importantly, they are willing to try.

This readiness is built through ordinary, repeatable routines: language-rich interaction through stories and conversation; predictable daily structure supported by regular meals; and opportunities to speak, play, and be heard in ways that connect learning to home and community life. These are not enrichment activities. They are the conditions under which learning becomes possible.

Alongside Bangla and home languages, early exposure to spoken English through songs, stories, and everyday classroom interaction supports listening, confidence, and cognitive flexibility, without introducing formal instruction or assessment.

Alignment between early learning and primary school

Early childhood works only when it is aligned with what follows. When pre-primary emphasises play, language, and interaction, but Grade 1 immediately shifts to rapid syllabus coverage and copying, readiness is wasted. Children who arrive curious quickly learn to stay quiet.

In a coherent system, early childhood and early primary reinforce one another. Play-based exploration gives way gradually to structured learning. Language-rich interaction supports early literacy. Feedback is immediate and gentle. Children experience early success and begin to associate effort with progress. This alignment is achieved not through new documents, but through shared expectations, simple routines, and protected time for early learning.

Trust, motivation, and early identity

Early childhood is where trust in the system is first formed. Children learn whether school is a place where mistakes are punished or treated as part of learning. Parents learn whether schools notice their children as individuals or only as numbers.

When early learning environments are calm, predictable, and respectful, children develop confidence. When teachers respond to what children say and do, motivation emerges naturally. No slogans are required.

Vignette: Early childhood experience of Chingma, Age 5

In the morning, we sing a song in Bangla and then one in Chakma. The teacher lets us choose which one to start with. I like the Chakma song because my grandmother sings it at home.

On the way to school, I pick up a few small stones near the path. When we sit in a circle, the teacher asks us to talk about what we saw on the way. I show my stones. She asks how many there are. We count them together on the floor.

Before we go home, we eat lunch at school. I feel less tired in the afternoon now. I like coming to school.

This vignette captures what readiness looks like when it is working. Learning is embedded in daily life. Language and culture are respected without becoming politicised. Feedback is immediate. Food and routine support attention. The child leaves school wanting to return.

System responsibility at this stage

Early childhood readiness cannot depend on exceptional teachers or well-resourced centres alone. It must be systemically reliable. That means:

- early learning time is protected,
- meals and basic wellbeing are treated as learning supports rather than welfare add-ons,
- teachers are supported to focus on interaction rather than paperwork, and
- expectations for Grade 1 build on, rather than discard, what children have learned.

When these conditions hold, readiness becomes a stabilising force. Teachers face less extreme variation. Children experience early success. Parents begin to trust that school is helping their child learn, not merely occupy time.

Early childhood does not solve inequality. But when it works, it prevents inequality from becoming destiny. It gives the system its first real chance to behave differently.

4.2 Foundational Primary (Grades 1–3): Learning That Builds Confidence

The first years of primary school determine whether children become independent learners or passive survivors of the system. When children master reading, writing, and basic mathematics early, they can learn from text, reason with numbers, and participate confidently. When they do not, every subsequent year becomes harder, and early gaps widen quietly.

This stage is therefore not one phase among many. It is the pivot point of the learning journey. At this stage, two dynamics are decisive: motivation and feedback. Children persist when effort leads to visible progress. They disengage when work feels repetitive, confusing, or disconnected from understanding. Teachers improve instruction when they can see what children understand as learning unfolds. They retreat to coverage and copying when feedback arrives too late or carries risk.

Learning as daily progress, not performance

Foundational learning succeeds when classrooms prioritise frequent, low-stakes practice rather than rare, high-stakes judgement. Short reading tasks, brief writing exercises, simple number work, and regular conversation allow teachers to observe learning in real time and adjust instruction immediately. Mistakes are expected. They are treated as information, not failure.

When feedback is immediate and usable, children understand what to improve and experience success quickly. Confidence grows not because tasks are easy, but because progress is visible.

Vignette: Rafi, Age 8

Last Sunday, we started with reading time. I chose a book with pictures of buses and roads.
After reading, we wrote two sentences. Mine was short. The teacher circled one word and showed me how to make it clearer. I tried again.
In maths, we watched a short video about mangoes being made into mango juice and amshotto. Then we went to the mango tree in our school yard and counted the mangoes together. We wrote the numbers and talked about which group had more. My friend explained it one way. I explained it another way.
After break, we do a short quiz. It is only a few questions. The teacher says it helps her see who needs more help this week.

At the end of the week, I brought home three books: one easy, one harder, and one with new words. My father asked which one I liked best.
I felt proud when I finished a book and understood it.

This vignette illustrates how motivation and feedback emerge through ordinary classroom routines rather than formal testing.

Protecting learning time and attention

Foundational learning is fragile. It depends on time, consistency, and attention. When instructional time is routinely interrupted, when teachers are rushed to complete syllabi, or when classrooms are overcrowded without support, early learning breaks down.

In a learning-oriented system, Grades 1–3 are protected. Instructional time is predictable. Daily routines are stable. Children eat during the school day so that concentration is possible. Teachers are supported to focus on instruction rather than administrative tasks. These protections are not enhancements. They are preconditions.

Alignment between curriculum, teaching, and assessment

Foundational learning works only when curriculum expectations, classroom practice, and assessment reinforce one another. When curriculum emphasises comprehension but assessment rewards recall, teaching narrows. When assessment is delayed or disconnected from instruction, feedback loses value.

In a coherent system, early assessments are simple, frequent, and used locally. They help teachers group students, adjust pacing, and identify who needs support. They are not used to rank schools or punish teachers. Their purpose is improvement, not signalling.

Within this aligned structure, continued exposure to spoken English through routine classroom interaction supports comprehension and confidence, without becoming a separate instructional burden or an assessed priority at this stage.

When feedback mechanisms are short and safe, teachers adapt. When they are long and punitive, teachers protect themselves.

The system responsibility at this stage

Foundational primary cannot depend on exceptional teachers alone. It must be systemically reliable. That means:

- feedback is embedded in everyday teaching,
- learning time is protected,
- early assessment supports instruction rather than anxiety,
- and success is defined by mastery rather than coverage.

When this stage works, later learning becomes possible. When it fails, every subsequent reform must compensate for what was missed.

Foundational learning does not require innovation. It requires discipline, alignment, and protection. When those conditions hold, children do not merely pass through school. They begin to own their learning.

4.3 Upper Primary (Grades 4–5): Trust and Reasoning

Upper primary is the stage where learning either deepens or quietly thins out. Students are expected to move beyond decoding and calculation toward explanation, reasoning, and

application. Whether this transition succeeds depends less on curriculum ambition than on whether classrooms are organised around trust.

Trust changes behaviour. It allows teachers to slow down without fear of sanction. It allows students to speak, disagree, and revise their thinking without embarrassment. It allows supervision to focus on instructional quality rather than surface compliance. Where trust is weak, classrooms revert to recitation and coverage. Where it is present, understanding becomes possible.

Learning through explanation and collaboration

In a learning-oriented system, upper primary classrooms make thinking visible. Students explain their reasoning, compare approaches, and learn from one another. Group work is structured and purposeful rather than performative. Writing is used to clarify ideas rather than reproduce text.

As reasoning deepens, structured opportunities to use English orally for explanation and discussion help normalise it as a language of thinking, without yet elevating it to a high-stakes or dominant instructional medium.

Feedback at this stage evolves from simple correctness to clarity and logic. Teachers need timely signals about how students are thinking so that misconceptions can be addressed before they harden. Short written responses, oral explanations, simple projects, and guided discussion provide this feedback when they are used locally and immediately. When feedback is reduced to marks or delayed judgement, reasoning gives way to performance.

Vignette: Upper Primary Students, Grade 5

This week, we worked in groups to plan a small garden behind the school. The teacher gave us a sheet with three questions to answer. We measured the space and wrote instructions.
When two groups disagreed, the teacher asked us to explain our reasons. She wrote two questions on the board that everyone had to answer in their notebooks.
We used a tablet to take photos and upload them to the class folder. The teacher showed us examples from another school. She said they were learning the same topic.

At the end of the week, we had a short test. It was not like the exam. The teacher said it helps the school see whether students in different classes are learning the same things.
I showed my mother the pictures at home.

Protecting space for deeper learning

Reasoning develops through discussion, revision, and reflection. It requires time and stability. When lessons are rushed, classrooms are frequently interrupted, or teachers feel pressure to prioritise coverage over understanding, this stage collapses into surface learning.

In a coherent system, upper primary is protected. Teachers are trusted to manage pacing. Supervisors focus on instructional quality rather than checklist compliance. Schools are encouraged to adapt lessons to student understanding rather than adhere rigidly to uniform schedules.

The system responsibility at this stage

Upper primary cannot rely on individual teacher confidence or goodwill. For reasoning to develop consistently, the system must make trust the safer option.

This requires:

- protecting instructional time so discussion and revision are possible,
- allowing teachers discretion over pacing without penalty,
- using supervision to support instructional quality rather than enforce uniform coverage,
- and ensuring that assessment at this stage rewards explanation rather than recall.

These conditions do not require new curricula or complex reform. They require restraint. They require the system to stop interrupting, rushing, and second-guessing classroom judgement at precisely the point where deeper learning begins.

When these conditions hold, upper primary classrooms become places where thinking is normalised and visible. When they do not, fragile learning is carried forward into later years, where it becomes far harder to repair.

4.4 Lower Secondary (Grades 6–8): Language, Reasoning, and Belonging

Lower secondary is a turning point. Students are expected to move beyond basic skills and begin interpreting texts, explaining ideas, and applying learning to unfamiliar situations. It is also the stage at which many students begin to disengage. The work becomes harder, the curriculum more abstract, and the consequences of falling behind more visible. If confidence and trust are not established at this point, learning quickly becomes mechanical or avoidant.

Language sits at the centre of this transition. Bangla as well as English are no longer only a subject to be memorised. It becomes the medium through which students must understand instructions, express reasoning, and engage with the world beyond school. When language learning is reduced to rote reproduction, students struggle silently. When it is treated as a tool for interpretation and explanation, confidence grows.

At this stage, trust is decisive. Students need to feel safe to speak imperfectly. Teachers need space to slow down, revisit concepts, and adapt lessons based on evidence rather than pace alone. Feedback must be frequent and usable, signalling what matters and what to work on next. Assessment begins to matter more, but it must still function as guidance rather than threat.

Enablers shape whether this is possible. Regular meals affect concentration. Predictable routines reduce anxiety. Modest digital tools support explanation and practice. Short, school-wide assessments help teachers see patterns and respond before gaps widen. When these conditions hold, lower secondary becomes a period of consolidation rather than loss.

In this kind of lower secondary classroom, learning is visible and purposeful. Language connects school to everyday life. Feedback clarifies expectations. Assessment provides direction rather than anxiety. Digital tools support explanation without replacing teaching. Students begin to see themselves as capable of reasoning, not merely repeating.

Vignette: Lower Secondary Students, Grades 7

In English class, our teacher asked us to bring a short text from home. My older sister helped me find a story from an old magazine about a boy travelling by launch on the river.

We read the story in class and underlined words we did not understand. The teacher asked us to guess their meaning from the sentence. When we were unsure, she showed us how to look them up using a dictionary app, which she shared on the classroom screen.

Later, she showed us a photo of a real launch ticket. We worked in pairs to read it carefully. We looked for the date, the destination, the seat number, and the price. Some of the words were printed very small. The teacher asked why it mattered to read them properly. She said this was also English.

After reading, we wrote a short paragraph explaining either the story or the ticket in our own words. The teacher did not give marks. She circled a few sentences and wrote brief notes. She said this helped her see who needed more practice with explanation.

Every few weeks, all students in our grade do a short English test. The teacher showed us a simple chart with the results. I read well, but my writing is still weak. She told me exactly what to practise and gave me a small exercise to take home.

At 11 everyday, we eat at school. I feel less tired during writing lessons now. On some days, we use the computer room to type our paragraphs. The computers are slow, but I like seeing my writing on the screen. I am learning how to understand and explain what I read, not just memorise it. Bangla feels useful, not frightening.

This is the stage at which many systems lose students quietly. It is also the stage at which the system can still pull them back. When trust, feedback, and alignment hold together, lower secondary strengthens foundations instead of eroding them, preparing students to face the pressures and choices that follow in upper grades.

4.5 Secondary (Grades 9–10): Credible Signals and Real Choice

Secondary education is where learning becomes consequential. Examinations carry weight. Pathways begin to narrow. Decisions start to feel permanent. Anxiety rises sharply when assessment signals are unclear, volatile, or untrusted.

In a learning-oriented system, secondary education provides credible signals. Students understand what they know, what they need to improve, and what options lie ahead. Assessment informs learning rather than overwhelming it. When signals are stable and intelligible, effort becomes purposeful. When they are not, effort turns strategic and defensive.

Assessment as information, not threat

At this stage, feedback must be clear, timely, and interpretable. Students should be able to answer simple questions: What am I doing well? Where am I struggling? What should I work on next?

This does not require constant testing or high-stakes judgement. It requires assessments that are aligned with classroom practice and explained in ways that make sense to students and families. When results are predictable and connected to learning, anxiety declines and focus improves.

Vignette: Secondary school experience of Nosheen and Baisakhi, Grade 9.

After our science test, the teacher gives us a sheet showing which skills we have mastered and which we still need to practise. The same format is used in other schools. My results are not a surprise. We have done similar questions in class and online, and the teacher showed us examples before the test. Once a term, the teacher meets with us to talk about pathways. She explains different options, including technical training and further academic study. She tells us what subjects matter for each one.

My parents receive a message explaining the results and what support the school will provide if I struggle. It feels like the school knows what it is doing.

In classrooms like this, assessment supports decision-making rather than fear. Results are specific. Weaknesses are identifiable. Improvement feels possible. Students focus on learning rather than gaming the system.

When assessment signals are weak or unstable, the opposite occurs. Anxiety rises. Shortcuts proliferate. Trust erodes quickly.

Choice requires guidance

Secondary education introduces choice, but choice without guidance is abandonment. In a functioning system, schools provide structured conversations about pathways. Academic, technical, and vocational routes are presented as legitimate options with progression and dignity.

Students are not funnelled silently. They are informed deliberately. Guidance connects learning to future possibilities without reducing education to narrow job preparation. It helps students understand how subjects, skills, and qualifications relate to further study, work, and mobility.

Clear guidance also reduces inequality. When information is shared openly, families rely less on private coaching and insider knowledge to manage risk.

Alignment at high stakes

Secondary education works when curriculum, assessment, and pathways send the same message: learning matters, and multiple futures are possible. When assessment rewards memorisation while pathways demand competence, trust breaks down.

High-stakes moments test systems. Integrity must be actively protected. Clear standards, transparent marking, and predictable rules are not technical details. They are what allow effort to remain directed toward learning rather than distortion.

The system responsibility at this stage

Secondary education cannot eliminate pressure. But it can determine where that pressure points.

That requires:

- assessment practices that are stable, interpretable, and aligned with teaching,
- clear communication of results to students and families,
- structured guidance on pathways before decisions become irreversible,
- and protection of assessment integrity so signals remain credible.

When these conditions hold, students invest effort with purpose rather than fear. Families trust the system enough to engage rather than hedge. Schools can focus on learning rather than damage control.

When they do not, anxiety dominates, shortcuts proliferate, and secondary education amplifies inequality rather than opportunity.

4.6 Upper Secondary (Grades 11–12): Pathways with Dignity and Direction

Upper secondary education is the point at which schooling becomes consequential. Decisions made during Grades 11 and 12 shape access to higher education, technical training, employment, and migration. For many families, this stage determines whether years of schooling translate into opportunity or stall without direction.

In Bangladesh, upper secondary has often functioned as a narrow academic filter rather than a stage of preparation. Prestige is attached to a limited set of academic outcomes, while technical and vocational routes are treated as residual. Guidance is weak, information is fragmented, and examination pressure dominates everyday experience. As a result, students frequently invest effort without a clear sense of what that effort is leading toward.

In a learning-oriented system, upper secondary does something different. It provides clarity rather than compression. It connects learning to credible futures without pretending that all constraints can be removed. Dignity at this stage comes from visibility, guidance, and honest signalling, not from eliminating examinations or promising outcomes the system cannot deliver.

Learning with purpose, not abstraction

At this stage, learning should feel connected to life beyond school. Subjects remain demanding and assessments still matter, but tasks increasingly require explanation, application, and judgement rather than recall alone. Students begin to see how different subjects prepare them for different pathways, and where further effort is required.

Feedback becomes selective but meaningful. Teachers do not comment on everything. They focus on one or two aspects that matter for improvement. Students learn to revise, refine, and take responsibility for their work. Learning is no longer symbolic. It has direction.

This does not require expensive equipment or imported models. It requires using existing classrooms differently: real examples, structured discussion, short revisions, and clear expectations about what quality looks like.

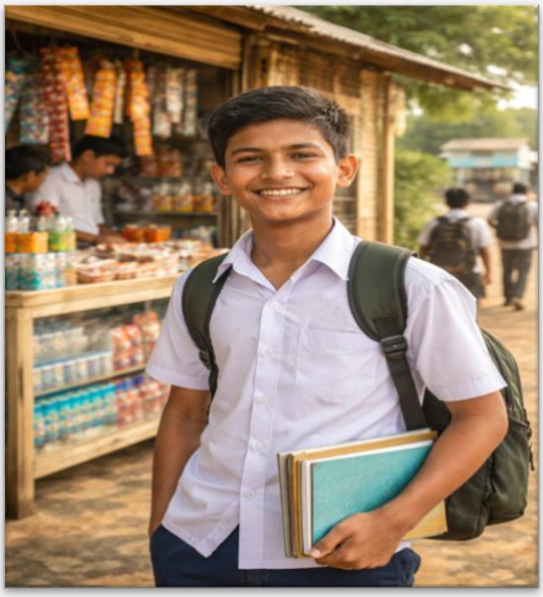
Vignette: Grade 11 experience of Sameer, Age 17

In Grade 11, our teachers explained that these two years matter because they open different paths. We were not told that only one path was respectable.

In science class, we worked on an assignment about electricity use at home. We listed the appliances we use, estimated costs, and discussed how power cuts affect daily life. We did not use expensive equipment. We used notebooks, a shared school computer, and examples from our own homes.

Our teacher asked us to explain our thinking, not just give answers. She returned our work with short comments and asked us to improve one part. I rewrote my explanation and understood it better the second time.

Once a month, the school holds a guidance session. We are told clearly what SSC and HSC results mean for different options. Some students plan for university. Some are interested in technical institutes. Some talk openly about working abroad. Teachers explain what skills and certificates are needed, not just marks.



My parents came to one meeting. The teacher explained my subjects and what they prepare me for. My parents still worry, but they understand more. They now ask me what I am learning, not only what grade I got.

Exams are still stressful. Coaching still exists. But I feel less lost. I know why I am studying these subjects and how they connect to life after school.

This vignette reflects an upper secondary experience where learning is connected to real futures. Guidance is explicit. Language and communication are treated as practical capabilities. Assessment pressure remains, but it is framed by direction rather than uncertainty.

Pathways that are visible and permeable

Upper secondary works when pathways are made visible early and treated with seriousness. Academic, technical, and vocational routes are explained clearly, using real examples rather than slogans. Students learn what qualifications are required, how progression works, and what risks and opportunities exist.

This includes acknowledging realities families already consider. For many households, overseas employment is a genuine pathway. A learning-oriented system does not ignore this or leave families to navigate it alone. It integrates preparation for language use, communication, digital literacy, and rights awareness into existing subjects rather than adding disconnected programmes.

Permeability matters. Students should not feel locked into irreversible choices at sixteen. Movement between general and technical routes must remain possible, even if imperfect. When pathways are rigid and hierarchical, anxiety narrows motivation. When they are transparent and flexible, aspiration broadens.

The role of teachers and schools at this stage

Teachers in upper secondary carry heavy content loads and operate under intense examination pressure. A realistic vision does not demand transformation without support. It requires clarity of role.

Teachers are not expected to be career counsellors or social workers. They are expected to:

- make expectations explicit,
- give limited but timely feedback,
- protect learning time,
- and participate in simple, structured guidance routines supported by the school.

Schools play a coordinating role. Even modest routines matter: one guidance session per month, one parent conversation per term, and one clear information sheet on pathways can significantly change how students and families experience this stage.

The system responsibility at this stage

Upper secondary cannot remove pressure. But it can determine where that pressure points.

That requires:

- curriculum and assessment that reward explanation and application, not only recall,
- clear and honest communication of results and expectations,
- structured guidance before choices become irreversible,
- and protection of pathway credibility so effort remains meaningful.

When these conditions hold, students invest effort with direction rather than fear. Families engage with confidence rather than hedging through private expenditure. Schools focus on preparation rather than damage control.

When they do not, upper secondary nullifies earlier gains. Effort becomes brittle, trust erodes, and schooling ends without direction. This is why upper secondary is not simply another stage, but a decisive test of whether the learning journey has coherence and purpose.

4.7 Parents, Families, and Community: Shared Responsibility

Parents and families experience the education system through signals, not policy documents. They judge whether the system is working based on what they can see, understand, and trust. When learning is opaque and assessment signals are unstable, families respond rationally by hedging through private expenditure. When learning is visible and communication is clear, trust becomes possible.

In a functioning system, families receive regular, intelligible information about what their children are learning and how they are progressing. This information does not arrive only at examination points. It is shared through simple messages, brief feedback, and conversations that explain both strengths and areas for improvement. Parents are not expected to become educators, but they are given enough clarity to support routines, encouragement, and effort at home.

Vignette: Parents of two school going girls

The teacher sends a short message about what our child is learning this week and what she found difficult. It tells us what she is practising in class and where she might need more help.

We know which book she should read and what kinds of questions we can ask her at home. Sometimes we talk about the story while she is reading. Sometimes we ask her to explain something she learned in her own words. We are not guessing anymore or worrying that we are asking the wrong things. We feel more confident supporting her, even when schoolwork feels unfamiliar to us.We feel more at ease as parents.

When communication works in this way, families stop managing risk alone. They begin to engage with the school as a partner rather than a hedge.

Community relationships also matter. Schools that connect with local organisations, health workers, and youth groups create broader support structures for learners. School meals, wellbeing services, and safe spaces are not peripheral benefits. They stabilise attendance, attention, and participation, particularly for students facing hardship.

The system responsibility at this stage is to make trust the easier choice for families. That requires:

- regular, comprehensible communication about learning and progress,
- feedback that explains what matters rather than simply reporting results,
- visible links between school learning and future opportunities,
- and basic supports that stabilise participation and wellbeing.

When these conditions hold, families invest time and attention rather than private substitutes. Public education regains credibility through everyday experience, not promise. Shared responsibility emerges because trust has been earned.

4.8 Coherence Across the Learning Journey

The learning journey only works when it holds together. Early childhood readiness must support foundational mastery. Foundational mastery must support reasoning and exploration. Exploration must feed aspiration. Upper secondary must open real pathways. Each stage depends on the integrity of the one before it.

This coherence does not arise from ambition alone. It depends on alignment across curriculum, teaching, assessment, and support structures. When these elements reinforce one another, learning becomes cumulative rather than fragile. Feedback arrives in time to matter. Motivation grows because effort leads somewhere. Trust develops because signals are consistent.

Enablers such as meals, instructional time, wellbeing support, and basic digital access are not separate initiatives. They are the conditions that allow learning to occur repeatedly and reliably. When these conditions are unstable, even strong teaching struggles to take hold. When they are protected, improvement compounds.

This chapter has not presented a shopping list of reforms. It has described the learning experience that the system must be capable of delivering if learning is to improve in a sustained way. That experience is the North Star that follows from the diagnosis in Chapter 3.

The chapters that follow return to institutions, accountability, and implementation. They ask how governance, incentives, and sequencing must change so that this learning journey is no longer exceptional, but normal—and so that coherence is built deliberately rather than assumed.

Chapter 5. Curriculum, Assessment, and Learning Progression

This chapter

- argues that curriculum and assessment are the system's primary coordination mechanisms, shaping behaviour far more than policy statements or reform rhetoric.
- shows that curriculum overload and weak sequencing undermine mastery by shifting coherence burdens onto teachers and families.
- demonstrates that learning progression fails when movement through grades substitutes for mastery, forcing later stages into remediation and sorting.
- explains how misaligned, high-stakes assessment rewards recall and predictability, hollowing out the meaning of credentials.
- locates accountability not in inspection or supervision, but in the signals sent by curriculum priorities and assessment design.
- shows how weak curriculum–assessment coherence fuels coaching markets, inequality, and loss of trust in public certification.
- positions curriculum coherence as both an equity instrument and an economic reform that restores the informational value of credentials.
- concludes that learning improvement requires altering system signals and reinforcing loops, not adding initiatives on top of incoherent structures.

Chapter 4 set out the learning journey the system must be capable of delivering if learning outcomes are to improve in a sustained way. That journey depends on coherence across stages, clarity about what mastery looks like, and consistency in the signals learners and teachers receive over time. Without these conditions, effort fragments, feedback arrives too late, and learning remains fragile.

Curriculum and assessment are the primary instruments through which this coherence is either created or undermined. They define what counts as learning, how progress is recognised, and which forms of effort are rewarded. In practice, they shape daily classroom behaviour far more powerfully than policy statements or reform rhetoric. When curriculum is overloaded or vague, teachers are forced to interpret rather than enact expectations. When assessment rewards recall rather than understanding, classrooms narrow regardless of stated intentions. When progression is unclear, students move forward without mastering what they need, and the learning journey breaks.

This chapter argues that curriculum is not a neutral technical document. It is the system's core coordination mechanism. When designed well and reinforced by aligned assessment, it protects instructional time, reduces cognitive overload, and creates shared expectations across classrooms, schools, and regions. When designed poorly, it shifts the burden of coherence onto teachers and families, amplifying inequality and reinforcing risk-averse behaviour.

Assessment is inseparable from this function. Assessment determines which parts of the curriculum are taken seriously, which are ignored, and which are rehearsed mechanically. Together, curriculum and assessment form the learning spine of the system. They are also the most consequential sites of accountability. What is assessed is what is taught. What is taught is what is practised. What is practised becomes the learning experience of students.

5.1 Curriculum as a System Signal, Not a Content Catalogue

In many systems, curriculum is treated as an aspirational catalogue of content rather than a governing signal. New priorities are added in response to social, political, or global pressures, but little is removed. The result is not ambition, but overload. Teachers face impossible coverage expectations. Students encounter breadth without depth. Mastery becomes episodic rather than cumulative.

In Bangladesh, this pattern has weakened coherence across grades. Foundational skills are introduced but not sufficiently protected. Later grades assume competencies that were never securely established. Teachers respond rationally by prioritising examinable content and visible completion rather than deep understanding. This is not a failure of professionalism or commitment. It is a predictable response to unclear and competing system signals.

A coherent curriculum functions as a constraint. It limits what must be taught so that what matters can be taught well. It makes explicit choices about depth over breadth, and about which learning outcomes are non-negotiable. It sequences learning deliberately, ensuring that each stage builds reliably on the last. In doing so, it reduces uncertainty for teachers and lowers the professional risk associated with instructional focus.

This constraint function is central to accountability. A curriculum that tries to cover everything ultimately holds no one accountable for anything. A curriculum that specifies priorities allows supervisors, school leaders, and communities to distinguish between genuine instructional difficulty and weak practice. It creates a shared reference point for improvement rather than a diffuse set of expectations that are impossible to meet simultaneously.

Curriculum coherence also depends on discipline in content selection. Content cannot be treated as an open vessel into which every social, political, or symbolic priority is placed. When content decisions are driven by political economy rather than learning progression, the result is not relevance but fragmentation. Over time, this undermines mastery, overloads classrooms, and weakens the credibility of the curriculum itself.

A learning system must therefore establish a clear principle: curriculum content is determined by what learners need to know and be able to do at each stage, not by what is expedient to include. Social values, national history, and civic priorities matter, but they must be integrated through pedagogically sound sequencing rather than accumulation. Where content expansion is not matched by corresponding reductions elsewhere, curriculum coherence collapses in practice.

Protecting curriculum integrity is not an ideological stance. It is a governance requirement. Without it, teachers are forced to navigate contradictions they did not create, and the system quietly shifts responsibility for coherence onto classrooms and households.

5.2 Learning Progression and the Protection of Foundations

Learning progression is not the same as movement through grades. It is the accumulation of capability over time. For progression to occur, mastery at one stage must be a realistic prerequisite for success at the next.

When progression is poorly specified, assessment substitutes ranking for diagnosis. Students pass without understanding. Teachers move on without confidence. Families invest in private tutoring to manage uncertainty. The system appears active, but learning remains shallow and fragile.

A progression-based curriculum makes depth visible. It defines what students should be able to do with knowledge at key transition points, particularly in literacy, numeracy, and reasoning. It specifies which concepts require sustained practice and which can be revisited flexibly. This clarity allows teachers to slow down without fear of falling behind, and it allows school leaders to protect instructional time for what matters most.

Learning progression only functions when it is treated as a binding system commitment rather than an aspirational principle. If progression is acknowledged in curriculum documents but overridden by assessment pacing, textbook sequencing, or examination calendars, it loses operational force. Teachers are then placed in an impossible position, expected to ensure mastery while also advancing on schedule. Predictably, schedule prevails. Making progression real therefore requires explicit protection of foundational stages, clarity about non-negotiable competencies, and alignment across curriculum, assessment, and instructional time. Without this alignment, progression remains rhetorical, and early learning remains fragile.

Protecting foundations is not a pedagogical preference. It is a system necessity. When early mastery is weak, later interventions become expensive, inequitable, and politically contentious. Upper grades are forced into remediation. Examinations become sorting devices rather than learning signals. Coaching markets expand. Inequality widens.

A coherent learning spine reduces this pressure upstream. It lowers the stakes of later reform by ensuring that later stages are not compensating for earlier failure.

5.3 Assessment as Reinforcement Rather Than Distortion

Assessment translates curriculum intent into behaviour. If assessment signals are misaligned, curriculum collapses in practice regardless of how well it is written.

In Bangladesh, high-stakes examinations reward predictability, memorisation, and coaching. This is not a technical flaw, nor an unintended side effect. It reflects a poorly designed accountability regime that prioritises short-term performance on narrow indicators while failing to verify whether learning has actually occurred.

Under this regime, recall is rewarded but understanding is not tested. Progression is enforced, but mastery is not required. Results are published, but responsibility for their validity is diffuse. Students are judged, teachers are pressured, and schools are ranked, yet no institution is clearly accountable for whether examination outcomes correspond to curriculum goals or real capability.

The result is not disciplined accountability, but its appearance. Actors across the system respond to the strongest visible signal, even when that signal is educationally empty. At the same time, authority over examination design, grading standards, and progression rules remains insulated from meaningful feedback about learning outcomes. Accountability is therefore displaced downward, while control over the signal remains concentrated elsewhere.

This produces both compliance and evasion. Teachers teach to the test because student survival depends on it. Families invest in coaching because they do not trust the signal. Students memorise because depth is punished without predictability. Meanwhile, no actor is held responsible for the widening gap between certified success and actual learning.

Misaligned assessment does more than narrow pedagogy. It distorts the meaning of achievement itself. When assessment rewards recall and predictability, grade inflation becomes structurally likely. Results rise without corresponding gains in understanding, and certificates lose their informational value. This inflation is not evidence of progress. It is evidence that assessment has detached from curriculum mastery.

As signal quality erodes, system-wide consequences follow. Teachers receive affirmation that does not reflect learning. Students progress without secure foundations. Parents interpret success through grades rather than capability. Over time, public confidence in assessment weakens, and informal filtering mechanisms expand to compensate. What appears as success on paper masks a deeper loss of trust in public certification.

Restoring assessment credibility therefore requires more than technical redesign. It requires an explicit commitment that assessment will verify curriculum mastery rather than substitute for it. Without this commitment, accountability remains performative. Actors are judged, but learning is not strengthened.

5.4 Curriculum, Assessment, and the Real Location of Accountability

To understand why these assessment failures persist, it is necessary to examine where accountability actually sits in the system.

In practice, accountability in education systems does not operate primarily through inspection or supervision. It operates through signals. Curriculum communicates what matters. Assessment confirms what will be rewarded. Together, they define which behaviours feel safe, risky, or pointless for actors across the system.

In Bangladesh, these signals pull in different directions. Curriculum documents articulate broad ambitions, but high-stakes examinations reward narrow performance. Teachers are formally accountable for coverage rather than mastery. Schools are judged by pass rates rather than by learning progression. Families, aware of this gap, hedge through private tutoring to manage risk. These responses are not distortions of the system. They are predictable outcomes of how accountability has been structured.

This is why accountability reform cannot be treated as an add-on or an enforcement problem. It is embedded in the architecture of curriculum and assessment. When expectations are diffuse and signals conflict, accountability shifts downward and inward. Teachers absorb responsibility for outcomes they cannot fully control. Students internalise failure without receiving feedback that explains why. Families convert uncertainty into private expenditure. The system appears active and disciplined, but responsibility is fragmented and learning remains brittle.

Accountability failure is intensified by institutional misalignment. Curriculum goals are articulated through one set of bodies, while high-stakes certification, examination design, marking standards, and progression rules are governed through others, with limited enforceable

mechanisms to ensure alignment. In such conditions, assessment inevitably overrides curriculum in practice, regardless of stated intent.

Expecting curriculum reform to succeed under these conditions places an impossible burden on teachers and curriculum designers alike. When examinations contradict curriculum progression, teachers must choose between professional judgment and student survival. Predictably, survival wins. This is not resistance to reform. It is rational compliance with the strongest signal in the system.

Future system design must therefore resolve this misalignment explicitly. Curriculum authority must be reflected in assessment design, timing, and standards. Where this alignment is absent, accountability fragments, grade inflation becomes structurally likely, and learning outcomes remain unstable.

A coherent learning spine relocates accountability back to the system. It clarifies what mastery looks like at each stage. It aligns assessment to progression rather than coverage. It enables supervisors, school leaders, and communities to ask meaningful questions about practice rather than relying on crude outcome proxies. Accountability becomes instructional rather than performative.

This shift matters politically as well as educationally. Systems that rely on fear, surveillance, and blame to enforce compliance exhaust themselves. Systems that embed accountability in shared learning expectations generate legitimacy. They are more resilient precisely because they reduce the need for constant enforcement and allow professional judgment to function.

5.5 From Curriculum Signals to Market Signals

Curriculum and assessment do not stop at the school gate. They shape how young people understand opportunity, risk, and return. Over time, they influence labour markets, credential value, and patterns of investment in human capital.

When learning progression is unclear and assessment rewards short-term recall, credentials lose informational value. Employers respond by discounting certificates and relying on informal screening, networks, or additional testing. Families respond by chasing grades rather than skills. Students respond by prioritising strategies that maximise progression rather than competence. This is the credentialism loop described in Chapter 3, and it is reinforced upstream by weak curriculum–assessment coherence.

A system that does not reliably signal what learners can do cannot support efficient labour market matching. Over time, this erodes trust not only in schools but in public qualifications themselves. The result is a fragmented market in which skills, credentials, and opportunity drift apart.

Curriculum coherence is therefore an economic reform, not just an educational one. When progression is visible and assessment reflects real capability, credentials regain meaning. Employers can trust signals. Students can see the link between effort and opportunity.

Vocational and technical pathways gain legitimacy when they are grounded in demonstrable competence rather than social status.

This is where curriculum connects directly to productivity and growth. A learning system that rewards depth, problem-solving, and application feeds a labour market that values capability. A system that rewards memorisation feeds a labour market that mistrusts formal education and relies on private filtering mechanisms.

5.6 Interrupting Reinforcing Loops That Undermine Learning

Appendix B shows that education systems stabilise around dominant feedback loops. These loops are not restated here as abstract system dynamics, but to show how everyday classroom behaviour, household decisions, and assessment practices stabilise around a small number of reinforcing patterns unless system signals are deliberately changed. This chapter translates that logic into everyday terms.

When curriculum is overloaded, teachers rush. When teachers rush, students memorise. When students memorise, examinations reward recall. When examinations reward recall, coaching markets expand. When coaching markets expand, inequality widens. When inequality widens, trust erodes. When trust erodes, families hedge further. The loop reinforces itself.

Breaking this cycle does not require heroic effort from teachers or moral exhortation to families. It requires altering the conditions under which decisions are made.

A coherent curriculum reduces overload. Reduced overload allows time-on-task to matter. When time-on-task produces mastery, formative feedback becomes useful. When feedback is useful, teachers are more willing to slow down. When slowing down is not punished by assessment, professional judgement strengthens. When professional judgement strengthens, reliance on private tutoring weakens. When reliance weakens, public confidence rises.

These are not abstract dynamics. They are observable behaviours. Systems that have shifted learning outcomes at scale have done so by changing which loops dominate, not by adding initiatives on top of existing structures.

5.7 Curriculum Coherence as an Equity Instrument

Curriculum incoherence does not affect all learners equally. It disproportionately harms those with fewer buffers.

Students from educated households can compensate for weak progression signals. They receive help at home, access private tutoring, and navigate opaque expectations. First-generation learners cannot. For them, unclear progression is not an inconvenience but a structural barrier.

A clear learning spine reduces this inequality. It makes expectations legible. It allows teachers to diagnose rather than guess. It gives students repeated opportunities to experience success. It shifts advantage from background to effort.

This is why foundational learning must be protected institutionally rather than rhetorically. When early mastery is secure, later choices widen. When it is not, systems are forced into late-stage remediation that is expensive, politicised, and rarely equitable.

Curriculum coherence therefore performs a quiet redistributive function. It reduces reliance on informal support systems that favour the already advantaged. It converts public schooling from a sorting mechanism into a capability-building one.

5.8 From Learning Journey to System Design

This chapter has grounded the learning journey described in Chapter 4 in its core system mechanisms. Curriculum defines what learning is. Assessment determines which learning counts. Together, they shape behaviour across classrooms, households, and markets.

They also define the feasible space for reform. Without a coherent learning spine, teachers are asked to compensate for systemic ambiguity. Assessment reform becomes politically risky. Accountability oscillates between neglect and punishment. Enabling systems struggle to stabilise impact.

With coherence, the burden shifts back to institutions rather than individuals. Expectations become explicit. Feedback arrives earlier. Accountability becomes meaningful rather than symbolic. Trust has something concrete to anchor to.

The next chapter turns to teachers on these terms. Teachers are no longer positioned as heroic interpreters of vague ambition or as shock absorbers for systemic incoherence. They are professionals working within a system that has made clear, enforceable choices about what learning it is responsible for delivering, and about how that responsibility will be shared.

Chapter 6. Teachers as Professionals in a Coherent System

This chapter

- shows how long-standing curriculum overload, assessment volatility, and weak learning enforcement shaped teaching practice toward compliance, coverage, and recall rather than instructional quality.
- demonstrates that system incoherence both constrained committed teachers and protected weak practice by diffusing responsibility for learning outcomes.
- explains how curriculum and assessment coherence reorders accountability by clarifying expectations, stabilising signals, and making instructional practice observable rather than ambiguous.
- examines how professional accountability shifts from procedural compliance to classroom practice once mastery, progression, and assessment alignment are enforced.
- sets out what professional support must look like under clarity, emphasising classroom-embedded coaching, feedback, and instructional leadership rather than episodic training.
- identifies the limits of professional development in a system with uneven capability, and explains why remediation, redeployment, and exit pathways become unavoidable once expectations are enforceable.
- reframes teacher wellbeing as sustainability under coherent expectations, linking workload, administrative burden, supervision, and learning outcomes rather than treating wellbeing as insulation from accountability.
- concludes that teacher professionalisation depends on system coherence, and that enforcing learning integrity necessarily entails confronting uneven practice rather than accommodating it through ambiguity.

Chapter 5 established curriculum and assessment as the system's learning spine. It showed that when priorities are explicit, progression is binding, and assessment verifies mastery rather than recall, the system makes a decisive shift from managing appearances to enforcing learning. This shift does not merely improve technical coherence. It fundamentally reorders responsibility, with direct consequences for teachers.

For decades, teaching in Bangladesh took place within systemic ambiguity. Overloaded curricula, contradictory directives, volatile examinations, and unrealistic pacing created conditions in which weak instruction could plausibly be attributed to system failure rather than classroom practice. In that environment, mechanical teaching, rote rehearsal, and coverage-driven instruction were often defensible adaptations to incoherent signals. Teachers operated in a system that rewarded compliance, tolerated low instructional ambition, and rarely verified whether learning had actually occurred.

However, ambiguity did more than constrain committed teachers. It also protected poor practice. Weak selection into teaching, limited screening for aptitude, and low expectations of instructional quality allowed some individuals to enter and remain in the profession precisely because it permitted minimal effort, predictable routines, and time for activities outside the classroom. In a system where learning outcomes were weakly enforced and assessment rewarded recall, such behaviour carried little professional cost. Compliance was sufficient. Instructional quality was optional.

Coherence changes this equilibrium. Once curriculum priorities are narrowed, learning progression is explicit, and assessment verifies mastery, the space for both excuse and evasion contracts. Teachers are no longer navigating noise. Expectations are clearer, instructional time is more defensible, and assessment signals are more stable. Under these conditions, persistent mechanical teaching is no longer a rational adaptation to system incoherence. It is a professional failure.

This chapter therefore does not proceed from a presumption of teacher virtue. It proceeds from a redefinition of accountability under clarity. When the system makes enforceable choices about what learning it is responsible for delivering, it also makes enforceable claims about professional behaviour. Some teachers will thrive under this shift. Others will struggle. Some will resist. That is unavoidable. What matters is that responsibility is no longer displaced onto curriculum documents, examination volatility, or administrative contradiction.

Teachers are no longer positioned as shock absorbers for systemic incoherence or as heroic interpreters of vague ambition. They are positioned as professionals operating within defined expectations, stable signals, and real consequences. With that repositioning comes both protection and obligation. This chapter sets out what the system now guarantees to teachers, what teachers are therefore accountable for, which practices are no longer acceptable once coherence exists, and what professional support must look like in a system that has decided to take learning seriously rather than symbolically.

6.1 Professional Accountability Under Coherence

The reordering of responsibility described above is not abstract. It has concrete implications for how teaching is defined, evaluated, and supported. Once curriculum priorities are narrowed, progression is binding, and assessment verifies mastery, the system makes a set of commitments to teachers. Those commitments, in turn, ground a sharper and more enforceable conception of professional accountability.

What the System Now Guarantees

A coherent system makes specific guarantees to teachers, and these guarantees are not symbolic.

First, it guarantees curriculum clarity. Teachers are no longer asked to cover everything. They are asked to teach what matters, in the order it matters, with sufficient time to secure mastery. Priority replaces accumulation, and depth replaces superficial completion.

Second, it guarantees assessment alignment. Teachers are no longer penalised for slowing down to ensure understanding. Examinations and progression rules reinforce curriculum intent rather than contradict it, removing the long-standing conflict between teaching well and helping students survive the system.

Third, it guarantees realistic instructional scope. Foundational learning is protected, pacing assumptions are defensible, and teachers are not expected to compensate for systemic overload through personal sacrifice, improvisation, or informal workarounds.

Fourth, it reduces noise. Administrative directives, reporting requirements, and reform initiatives are constrained by the learning spine rather than layered indiscriminately on top of

it. Teachers receive fewer, clearer signals about what matters, and those signals are stable over time.

These guarantees matter because they narrow the space of acceptable explanation. Once they exist, persistent weak instruction can no longer be attributed to impossible conditions. The system has created the conditions under which professional judgement can operate. It can now expect that judgement to be exercised.

What Teachers Are Therefore Accountable For

Under coherence, accountability shifts decisively from compliance to practice. Teachers are accountable for instructional quality. This includes how concepts are explained, how understanding is checked, how errors are responded to, and how lesson time is allocated. Teaching is no longer defined by syllabus completion or examination preparation alone, but by whether students are actually learning what the system has deemed essential.

They are accountable for the exercise of professional judgement. Decisions about pacing, differentiation, and when to slow down to secure mastery are no longer optional or deferrable. Once mastery is non-negotiable, judgement becomes a professional obligation rather than a discretionary add-on.

They are accountable for classroom practice. Passive supervision, extended copying, and mechanical rehearsal without feedback are no longer defensible strategies when expectations are realistic and instructional time is protected.

They are accountable for engagement with feedback. When assessment and supervision generate usable information about learning, ignoring that information is no longer neutral. It represents a failure to act on evidence within one's professional remit.

This is a substantially higher bar than the system has historically enforced. That is deliberate. A system that clarifies its expectations must also accept the consequences of enforcing them.

What Is No Longer Acceptable

Once coherence exists, several practices lose legitimacy. Mechanical coverage is no longer acceptable. Advancing through content without evidence of understanding is not neutral compliance. It is instructional neglect.

Passive compliance is no longer acceptable. Following directives without engaging intellectually with their purpose is incompatible with professional teaching under clarity.

Reliance on coaching markets is no longer acceptable. Teachers cannot outsource instructional responsibility to private tutors while retaining public authority. Coaching markets expanded because assessment signals were untrustworthy. When assessment verifies mastery, that justification disappears.

Avoidance of instructional responsibility is no longer acceptable. Persistent weak learning cannot be attributed solely to student background once foundations are protected and expectations are realistic.

These are not moral judgements about individual teachers. They are structural implications of coherence. A system that does not enforce these boundaries will reproduce the very equilibrium it claims to reject, regardless of how well its curriculum or assessments are written.

6.2 What Professional Support Looks Like Under Clarity

Higher expectations without support would be punitive, but support that is disconnected from instructional responsibility is equally corrosive. Under coherence, professional support must therefore change in both form and purpose. In an incoherent system, support is typically episodic, generic, and symbolic. Workshops substitute for practice, training is delivered away from classrooms, and new ideas are introduced without follow-through. Teachers are left to translate abstract guidance into daily instruction on their own. In such conditions, professional development becomes performative: attendance replaces learning, certification replaces improvement, and very little changes inside classrooms.

A coherent system cannot rely on this model. Once curriculum priorities are explicit and assessment verifies mastery, professional support must move directly into the instructional core. Support shifts from transmission to practice, and from exposure to accountability. Mentoring, observation, and coaching focused on real classrooms become central rather than supplementary. Teachers need structured opportunities to see effective instruction enacted against the actual curriculum they are responsible for teaching, to attempt new approaches with their own students, and to receive feedback grounded in evidence of learning rather than compliance with procedure. This form of support makes instructional quality visible. It also makes avoidance visible. That visibility is not a side effect. It is the point.

Collaboration replaces isolation, but not as an abstract professional value. Professional learning communities organised around curriculum progression, student work, and common assessment tasks create peer accountability that is more credible than external inspection. When teachers examine student errors together, compare instructional choices, and observe one another teaching the same material, weak practice is harder to hide and strong practice is easier to diffuse. Collegiality under clarity is therefore not about comfort or morale alone. It is about shared responsibility for learning outcomes.

School leadership is pivotal in this shift. Under coherence, the role of school leaders is redefined. They are no longer primarily administrators of rules or intermediaries for directives. Their central responsibility becomes instructional leadership: diagnosing teaching practice, prioritising support where learning is weakest, protecting time for professional work, and sustaining a culture in which improvement is expected rather than optional. Leadership that cannot engage with instruction does not remain neutral under these conditions. It becomes a bottleneck rather than a support.

This model of professional support is demanding. It requires time, instructional expertise, and sustained investment. It also requires the system to tolerate visible struggle during transition, as teaching practice is exposed to scrutiny that was previously absent. However, it is the only form of support that is commensurate with the expectations the system has now set. Professional support under clarity is not a substitute for accountability. It is its counterpart. Support exists to enable teachers to meet higher standards, not to excuse their absence. Where support is provided and learning does not improve, the system gains information it previously lacked. That information is essential for distinguishing between teachers who require further development and those who are unwilling or unable to meet professional expectations.

Without this form of support, higher standards collapse into rhetoric. With it, responsibility becomes actionable.

6.3 Selection, Capability, and the Limits of Reform

Curriculum and assessment coherence expose a difficult truth that has long been obscured by system ambiguity. Not all teachers currently in the system will be able to meet the expectations that coherence makes enforceable. This is not a speculative risk. It is an empirical consequence of years of weak selection, uneven preparation, limited screening for instructional aptitude, and an accountability regime that tolerated low instructional ambition as long as procedural compliance was maintained.

This outcome is not the failure of individuals alone. It is the predictable result of a system that prioritised staffing stability, credential fulfilment, and administrative coverage over subject mastery, pedagogical capability, and classroom performance. However, once coherence exists, that history can no longer be used to defer responsibility indefinitely. Exposure creates choice. The system must decide whether it is willing to act on the information coherence generates.

There are only two viable paths. The first is to dilute expectations in order to accommodate current capability. This path preserves surface stability, avoids confrontation, and reassures incumbents, but it reproduces the very equilibrium that Chapter 2 diagnosed. Learning remains optional, credentials continue to drift away from capability, and reform collapses into symbolic adjustment. The second path is to maintain expectations and confront the institutional and political consequences of doing so. This path is difficult. It requires confronting uneven performance, managing resistance, and accepting that not all incumbents will remain in instructional roles. But it is the only path consistent with taking learning seriously.

Professional development has a central role in this transition, but its limits must be acknowledged explicitly. Training and mentoring can raise capability over time where foundational knowledge exists and effort is present. They cannot indefinitely compensate for weak subject mastery, persistent instructional avoidance, or refusal to engage with feedback once expectations are clear and support is available. A system that pretends otherwise merely postpones failure and shifts its cost onto students.

Clear standards therefore require clear pathways. These include structured remediation for teachers with development potential, redeployment to non-instructional roles where appropriate, and exit mechanisms where minimum professional standards cannot be met despite support. These pathways are not punitive instruments. They are governance necessities in a system that claims learning as a non-negotiable outcome rather than a hopeful aspiration.

Once coherence exists, protecting every incumbent becomes incompatible with protecting learning. This is not an argument against teachers. It is an argument against pretending that reform can succeed without confronting selection, capability, and the limits of accommodation. A system that refuses to make these choices will eventually make a different one by default: it will sacrifice learning while preserving appearances.

6.4 Wellbeing as Sustainability Under Professional Expectations

Teacher wellbeing has often been framed as protection from pressure or as a compensatory response to systemic failure. Under coherence, it must be reframed more precisely as

sustainability under real professional expectations. A system that is serious about learning cannot promise comfort, but it must guarantee conditions under which sustained, demanding work is possible.

Wellbeing in this sense is not an emotional abstraction. It rests on concrete institutional conditions: manageable workload, predictable routines, timely salary disbursement, and supervision that is firm but respectful. It requires the deliberate removal of unnecessary administrative burden so that teachers' cognitive and emotional effort can be directed toward instruction rather than compliance. When reporting, monitoring, and directive overload dominate the working day, stress is not an individual resilience problem. It is a system design failure.

Wellbeing under coherence also requires honesty about the nature of the work. Teaching in a system that enforces mastery is demanding. It requires sustained attention, diagnostic skill, responsiveness to student misunderstanding, and emotional labour in classrooms where failure is no longer hidden by automatic progression. A system that softens this reality in rhetoric while intensifying expectations in practice undermines trust and accelerates burnout.

Sustainable professionalism emerges when effort is meaningfully connected to outcomes. When instructional improvement leads to visible learning gains, when feedback is timely and usable, and when excellence is recognised through practice rather than symbolic praise, professional motivation stabilises. In such conditions, wellbeing is not achieved by lowering expectations, but by ensuring that expectations are coherent, effort is not wasted, and teachers can see that their work matters.

6.5 From Teacher Reform to System Credibility

This chapter has not argued that teachers are the sole lever of reform. It has argued the opposite. Teachers cannot be professionalised in the absence of system coherence, and no amount of exhortation, training, or surveillance can substitute for clear curriculum priorities, aligned assessment, and realistic instructional scope.

Once coherence begins to take hold, however, teacher behaviour becomes central. Instructional responsibility moves closer to classrooms. Avoidance becomes visible. Excellence becomes distinguishable from routine. The system can no longer plausibly attribute weak learning to ambiguity alone.

This shift is uncomfortable. It exposes uneven capability, entrenched habits, and resistance that was previously obscured by incoherence. It also makes clear that professionalisation is not a rhetorical commitment but a practical one, with consequences for selection, support, progression, and exit. A system that is unwilling to confront these implications will inevitably dilute expectations and reproduce the equilibrium described in Chapter 2.

At the same time, this chapter does not assume that the system can move instantly from today's conditions to full professional accountability. Many teachers will require sustained support to meet higher expectations. Some will improve. Some will struggle. Some will not adapt. That transition must be managed deliberately rather than denied. The National Learning Implementation Framework, which accompanies this document, sets out the sequencing, safeguards, and institutional mechanisms required to move from clarity on paper to capability in practice, without either retreating from standards or imposing them prematurely.

Professional judgement, in this sense, is not assumed to be uniformly present today. It is learned, exercised, and verified over time under conditions of clarity. Coherence does not presuppose a fully capable workforce on day one. It creates the conditions under which capability can be developed, observed, and distinguished from avoidance. Without those conditions, judgement cannot be meaningfully assessed at all. With them, it becomes possible to invest in development where potential exists and to act decisively where it does not.

What is not optional is direction. The system must be explicit about where it is heading, what professionalism will mean once coherence is established, and which practices will ultimately no longer be tolerated. Phasing is a strategy for change, not a justification for delay.

The next chapter turns to enabling systems. It asks whether governance, resourcing, and institutional design are capable of sustaining this transition over time, or whether political pressure, administrative inertia, and vested interests will force a retreat back into ambiguity. The credibility of the entire reform agenda rests on that choice.

Chapter 7. Enabling Systems and the Politics of Sustaining Coherence

This chapter

- shows how coherence shifts responsibility upward from classrooms to the institutions that govern, certify, finance, and defend the education system
- explains why coherence generates conflict rather than harmony by exposing deferred decisions and institutional contradictions once learning outcomes become visible
- demonstrates how governance structures built for administration struggle when required to enforce alignment and arbitrate instructional standards
- analyses how weak sideways enforcement allows institutions to absorb pressure through delay, parallel interpretation, and exception-making
- shows how career systems become the primary site where enforcement either gains consequence or collapses into dilution once performance is differentiated
- examines how finance and verification systems can stabilise retreat by prioritising paperwork compliance over instructional consequence
- explains why data systems fail when information circulates without feedback loops that trigger correction, support, or sanction
- concludes that system credibility is tested at the point of political pressure, and that sustaining coherence depends on institutions choosing enforcement over retreat into ambiguity

Chapters 5 and 6 established what coherence requires. Curriculum priorities must be explicit, assessment must verify mastery, and teachers must be held professionally accountable under clear and enforceable expectations. Together, these shifts move the system away from managing appearances and toward enforcing learning as a concrete outcome rather than a symbolic aspiration.

Once this happens, the weakest link in the system changes. Under ambiguity, weak learning could be absorbed at the classroom level. Overloaded curricula, volatile examinations, and contradictory directives provided plausible explanations for failure, allowing responsibility to float across actors and institutions. Enforcement never fully arrived, and institutional arrangements remained intact even as learning deteriorated.

Under coherence, responsibility moves upward. When curriculum is narrowed, assessment aligned, and instructional expectations clarified, weak learning is no longer plausibly explained by design failure alone. It becomes visible as an enforcement problem. Pressure shifts away from teachers and toward the institutions that govern, certify, finance, monitor, and defend the system.

This is where reform has historically broken. Coherence does not create harmony. It creates conflict. It forces decisions that were previously deferred, exposes contradictions between mandates, and makes retreat politically tempting. The critical moment arrives when mastery-verified assessment produces its first visible shock, for example when examination results no longer match the familiar story of steady improvement and high pass rates, and when previously hidden variation in performance becomes publicly legible.

This chapter examines whether Bangladesh's enabling systems are capable of sustaining coherence once that shock arrives, or whether they will absorb pressure by softening standards, carving exceptions, and allowing ambiguity to re-enter through institutional practice. The test is not technical readiness, but credibility under pressure.

7.1 Governance Under Coherence: From Administration to Enforcement

Education governance in Bangladesh has been built to administer scale rather than to enforce learning integrity. Its core functions are distribution, staffing, reporting, approvals, and compliance monitoring. These functions are indispensable in a large and complex system, but they were never designed to arbitrate instructional standards or to resolve conflicts over what counts as mastery once expectations harden.

Coherence changes the role governance must play. Once curriculum priorities are explicit and assessment verifies mastery, governance can no longer operate primarily as a transmission mechanism. Someone must decide whose interpretation holds, what constitutes acceptable performance, and what happens when outcomes contradict stated intent. Governance shifts from administration to arbitration, from passing information upward to enforcing alignment across institutions.

This shift exposes the system's weakness in sideways enforcement. Curriculum signals are set by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. Certification authority sits with the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education and the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. Delivery and supervision operate through parallel chains in the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education and the Directorate of Primary Education. BANBEIS renders the system increasingly visible through data, while inspection and audit functions focus primarily on procedural and financial compliance. Each institution has a defined mandate, but no routine mechanism compels alignment when mandates collide.

Under ambiguity, this architecture is stable. NCTB can narrow curricula without controlling how assessments interpret them. Boards can certify outcomes that reward recall rather than mastery. DSHE and DPE can supervise attendance and coverage without engaging instructional quality. BANBEIS can document learning gaps without triggering corrective action. Inspection mechanisms can verify files and expenditure while classrooms stagnate. Responsibility is vertically strong but horizontally hollow.

Under coherence, this arrangement becomes unstable. Once assessment aligns with curriculum and instructional expectations harden, contradictions between institutions can no longer be absorbed quietly. Governance must enforce sideways, not just upward. It must compel alignment between curriculum intent and certification practice, between supervision routines and instructional quality, and between data visibility and corrective authority.

When governance lacks the authority, routines, or political backing to do this, enforcement stalls at institutional boundaries. Disputes are resolved through delay, parallel interpretation, or escalation rather than through instructional standard-setting. What previously appeared as coordination problems become enforcement failures. Governance built for administration begins to fracture when asked to defend learning integrity.

When sideways enforcement fails, responsibility is displaced downward. Schools face pressure from parents and communities, but without authority to change curriculum, assessment, or

staffing. Informal community scrutiny intensifies unevenly, reproducing the weak and unequal horizontal accountability patterns described in Appendix A. These pressures do not correct system misalignment; they stabilise it by shifting risk onto households.

7.2 Incentives, Careers, and the Persistence of Low Stakes

Under coherence, the system must differentiate between effort, capability, and avoidance. Once mastery is verified and instructional outcomes become visible, uniform treatment of performance is no longer neutral. It becomes an active choice to absorb pressure rather than to act on it.

Career systems are where this differentiation either acquires consequence or collapses. Postings, transfers, and promotions determine whether visible performance matters. If instructional outcomes do not shape careers, enforcement stalls regardless of how clear expectations become elsewhere in the system.

Under conditions of ambiguity, insulation was stabilising. When learning outcomes were weakly verified and instructional quality was difficult to observe, seniority-based and compliance-based career structures reduced conflict and protected institutional equilibrium. They allowed the system to function without constant confrontation over performance or capability.

Coherence alters this settlement. If mastery is verified, then career systems that cannot respond become the primary site where enforcement fails. Visible variation in instructional quality demands decisions about support, remediation, redeployment, and exit. These decisions are not primarily pedagogical. They are political, because they disrupt long-standing protections and expose uneven capability that was previously concealed by ambiguity.

The predictable response is not open resistance, but dilution. Expectations are reframed as aspirational. Performance signals are treated as provisional. Enforcement is delayed in the name of transition. Over time, low stakes reassert themselves even as reform language remains intact and coherence is preserved rhetorically.

The system therefore faces a structural choice. It can absorb pressure by softening standards so that careers remain insulated, or it can absorb conflict by changing incentives so that performance differentiation has consequence. Coherence cannot survive if career systems continue to function as shock absorbers once outcomes become visible.

7.3 Finance, Verification, and Money Without Consequence

Finance does not merely fund education. It signals what the system values. What gets verified gets done. What gets audited gets performed. What is measured on paper becomes the target of effort.

Bangladesh’s education financing system evolved under ambiguity. Budgets are rigid and salary-heavy, verification prioritises paperwork, and links between expenditure and instructional outcomes are weak. In this environment, effort concentrates on producing compliant documentation rather than verifiable learning, and discretionary space is preserved within delivery chains.

Under ambiguity, this arrangement is politically manageable. Increased spending can be presented as commitment, while weak learning outcomes are attributed to scale, poverty, or disruption. Finance performs a symbolic function, demonstrating effort without demanding proof of instructional impact.

Coherence changes the meaning of money. When learning expectations are explicit and assessment verifies mastery, the gap between expenditure and outcomes becomes visible. Budget flows that do not translate into improved instruction attract scrutiny. Verification practices that focus on files rather than classrooms become politically exposed.

The retreat mechanism is predictable. Paperwork compliance intensifies. Inspection and audit activity increase around inputs. Classroom-level verification remains thin. Outcome proxies replace mastery as the object of attention. Hard verification is delayed or displaced to protect discretionary space. These moves stabilise institutions, but they weaken coherence.

Finance can sustain reform only when verification follows learning rather than paperwork, and when expenditure is treated not as proof of effort but as a claim that must be justified by instructional effect. Without this shift, additional resources risk reinforcing compliance intensity while leaving learning unchanged.

7.4 Information, Feedback, and the Limits of Data

Bangladesh's education system is increasingly legible upward. BANBEIS and the directorate systems generate extensive information on enrolment, staffing, infrastructure, attendance, and performance, and reporting routines are well established. Administrative visibility has expanded steadily.

The constraint lies in what information does once it circulates. Reporting is reliable. Feedback with consequence is not. Data move efficiently to higher levels of the system, but they rarely return to schools or institutions in forms that trigger correction, support, or sanction. Information accumulation substitutes for action.

This produces reporting loops rather than feedback loops. Under ambiguity, such loops are sufficient. Weak outcomes can be documented without forcing institutional response, and responsibility remains diffuse. The system appears active while behaviour remains unchanged.

Under coherence, information takes on a different role. When assessment verifies mastery and curriculum priorities are explicit, data no longer merely describe patterns. They allocate responsibility. Variation in outcomes becomes evidence of enforcement gaps rather than system noise.

It is at this point that retreat mechanisms activate. Institutions manage implications through timing, framing, indicator choice, and narrative adjustment. Data releases are delayed, comparisons softened, and trends reframed as transitional. Reporting continues, but the capacity of information to change behaviour weakens.

Appendix B explains why feedback loops matter for system behaviour. This chapter shows why they are most fragile when coherence makes performance visible and follow-through costly. Data do not threaten institutions because they are incomplete. They threaten institutions because they demand decisions.

7.5 Managing Resistance: Politics, Media, and Public Narrative

Coherence does not fail quietly. It provokes resistance because it removes buffers that previously absorbed blame. When assessment begins to verify mastery and instructional expectations harden, long-standing accommodations come under threat.

Assessment reform is often the first flashpoint because certification is where visibility concentrates. When boards adjust marking or grading standards, public narratives quickly form around standards falling or fairness being undermined. Media translate uncertainty into decline. Coaching markets mobilise parental anxiety by presenting reform as risk. Unions resist enforcement perceived as uneven or premature. Local political actors intervene to protect incumbents through postings and transfers.

These responses are not aberrations. They are structural reactions to exposure. Coherence makes outcomes legible and allocates responsibility, raising the political cost of enforcement.

Reforms rarely collapse because their logic is flawed. They retreat because pressure arrives before institutions have committed to bearing the cost of enforcement. Narrative softening becomes the first line of defence. Language shifts from mastery to progress, from standards to flexibility, from enforcement to transition. Exceptions are introduced. Pilots proliferate. Over time, standards blur without ever being formally abandoned.

When institutions retreat, enforcement is displaced downward. Households intensify risk management through private tutoring and coaching. Communities exert uneven pressure on schools without authority to change system signals. The informal horizontal accountability patterns described in Appendix A reassert themselves, not as a solution, but as a symptom of state retreat.

Systems that fail to anticipate this dynamic often misinterpret backlash as evidence of reform error rather than as evidence that reform has begun to work. Retreat then occurs precisely when credibility is being tested.

7.6 Phasing Without Retreat: The Role of the National Learning Implementation Framework

Sequencing is necessary in any system-wide reform, but dilution is fatal. The distinction between the two is not technical. It is political, and it determines whether coherence is sustained or quietly undone.

Phasing exists to manage capacity, not to abandon standards. Phased enforcement means fixed direction, time-bound support, and staged verification. Abandonment takes the language of readiness, stability, or consensus and uses it to justify indefinite postponement. The difference lies not in pace, but in commitment.

The National Learning Implementation Framework plays a critical role in holding this line. Its function is not to operate as a technical checklist or a menu of optional reforms. It operates as a political buffer. By sequencing actions while keeping non-negotiables fixed, it protects coherence from the pressures that arise once enforcement begins to bite.

For phasing to serve this purpose, it must be explicit. The system must be clear about what will change, over what period, and what practices will ultimately no longer be tolerated once transition periods end. Without this clarity, sequencing becomes indistinguishable from retreat.

Phasing, properly understood, is a strategy for sustaining direction under pressure. Used otherwise, it becomes the mechanism through which coherence is lost while reform appears to continue.

7.7 What Failure Would Look Like

Failure rarely announces itself directly. It emerges through a series of moves that appear reasonable in isolation but are corrosive in combination. Exceptions are introduced in the name of pragmatism. Delays are framed as prudence. Pilot programmes proliferate without clear pathways to scale. Public narratives soften expectations while formal standards remain unchanged on paper.

Under these conditions, curriculum ambition is preserved rhetorically but not enforced in practice. Assessment alignment is postponed rather than rejected. Teacher accountability is discussed repeatedly but acted on selectively. Data continue to circulate, but without consequence.

Failure has recognisable signatures. Standards remain in circulars, but boards calibrate marking to restore pass rates. Supervision returns to checklist compliance. Data publication becomes less comparable over time. Responsibility is displaced downward, and households compensate for uncertainty through private expenditure.

The system continues to claim reform, but ambiguity re-enters through interpretation, discretion, and delay. What appears as flexibility becomes drift. What is described as caution functions as retreat.

Making this pattern visible before it unfolds is one of the central purposes of this chapter. Systems rarely fail because they lack intelligence or effort. They fail because the mechanisms of retreat are familiar, politically comfortable, and poorly named.

7.8 System Credibility as the Final Test

Bangladesh does not lack plans. It lacks credibility at the point where reform becomes costly. Credibility is not tested at launch. It is tested the first time examination results stop matching the old story. It is tested when mastery-verified assessment produces a distributional shift, when headlines turn hostile, and when insiders demand exceptions.

If assessment returns to being a performance signal rather than a mastery signal, the learning spine collapses. Coherence unravels not because it was wrong, but because it was not defended.

At that moment, leadership faces a choice. It can absorb pressure, defend coherence, and accept instability as the price of enforcement. Or it can retreat into ambiguity, soften expectations, and preserve short-term stability at the expense of learning.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed what coherence requires. This chapter has shown what it costs. The credibility of the reform agenda rests on whether institutions are willing to bear that cost. There is no neutral path. Only a choice.

Chapter 8 Implementation Logic and the Non-Negotiables

This chapter

- Reframes implementation as a set of governing rules rather than a delivery plan, sequencing manual, or programme portfolio.
- Shows how reforms commonly fail through accumulation, exception, and delay rather than explicit reversal.
- Defines a set of non-negotiable system conditions that must hold if coherence is to survive enforcement pressure.
- Demonstrates how weakening any single non-negotiable triggers retreat across curriculum, assessment, professional accountability, and governance.
- Distinguishes phasing that builds capability under fixed commitments from phasing that functions as dilution of standards.
- Explains why initiative layering fragments signals, erodes instructional time, and weakens enforcement even when individual programmes are well designed.
- Establishes the required order of operations between expectations, support, and enforcement to preserve legitimacy.
- Clarifies the role of the National Learning Implementation Framework as a sequencing instrument that protects direction rather than reopens settled principles.
- Identifies which system decisions cannot be revisited once enforcement begins without reintroducing ambiguity.
- Concludes that implementation is ultimately a credibility test, determined by whether institutions defend non-negotiables when political pressure intensifies.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 established what coherence requires, what it demands of professionals, and why it becomes politically difficult to sustain once enforcement begins and produces visible disruption. Together, they show that the primary risk to reform is not technical failure, but retreat under pressure. Implementation logic therefore cannot be treated as a sequencing plan or a delivery manual. It must operate as a set of governing rules that protect coherence when enforcement becomes uncomfortable. Non-negotiables constrain direction, not methods; they define what must be preserved when trade-offs are demanded, not how change must be delivered.

In systems that fail to sustain reform, implementation often comes to be treated as a portfolio of programmes. Initiatives are launched, pilots proliferate, and activity is mistaken for progress. When pressure arrives from results, media scrutiny, or internal resistance, programmes can be paused, reframed, or quietly absorbed without any formal decision to abandon reform. Coherence dissolves not through explicit reversal, but instead through accumulation, exception, and delay.

This chapter sets out a different approach. Implementation logic here is not about what to do next, but about what must not be undone once enforcement begins to bite. It defines the non-negotiables that anchor the reform agenda, specifies what phasing is allowed to mean, and establishes discipline over how change is introduced. Its purpose is to ensure that sequencing strengthens coherence rather than reopening settled questions when pressure intensifies.

This chapter does not describe delivery steps, allocate responsibilities, or restate the National Learning Implementation Framework. It provides the constitutional logic within which all implementation must operate. Without this logic, even well-designed reforms revert to symbolic compliance once enforcement becomes costly.

8.1 From Reform Activity to Governing Rules

Reform fails when implementation is treated as additive. New priorities are layered onto existing routines, additional reporting is introduced alongside old requirements, and institutions are asked to do more without stopping anything. In such environments, coherence is structurally impossible. The system becomes busier rather than clearer, and enforcement weakens rather than strengthens.

A coherent system therefore requires governing rules that constrain action. These rules determine what takes priority, what must align, and what cannot be traded away when pressure arrives. They are not programme guidelines or implementation preferences. They are system-level constraints that apply regardless of which initiatives are active, funded, or politically salient at any given moment.

These governing rules matter most where authority is distributed across institutions rather than concentrated within a single delivery chain. In such systems, coherence depends not only on vertical compliance within agencies, but on sideways enforcement across curriculum, assessment, supervision, and verification functions. Without rules that bind these functions together, institutional boundaries become sites where enforcement stalls and ambiguity re-enters.

Implementation logic therefore functions as a filter rather than a plan. It distinguishes actions that are permissible because they reinforce the learning spine from actions that are impermissible because they fragment signals, overload classrooms, or dilute accountability. This logic does not replace planning or sequencing. It disciplines them by setting limits on what can be done without undermining coherence.

The purpose of naming non-negotiables is not rigidity for its own sake. It is to prevent the re-entry of ambiguity through well-intentioned accommodation. When non-negotiables are absent, every difficulty becomes an opportunity to reopen foundational decisions. When they are explicit, difficulty is managed within constraints rather than resolved through retreat

8.2 The Non-Negotiables of Coherence

Five non-negotiables anchor the reform agenda. They are not programme components, implementation priorities, or thematic commitments. They are system conditions that must hold if coherence is to survive enforcement. If any one of them is weakened, coherence collapses regardless of how much activity continues elsewhere in the system.

The first non-negotiable is the integrity of the learning spine. Curriculum priorities, learning progression, instructional time, and language of instruction must remain aligned and mutually reinforcing. Foundational learning cannot be compressed or bypassed to accommodate coverage pressures, examination calendars, or political demands without undermining the reform logic as a whole. Once mastery is defined as a requirement rather than an aspiration, progression without learning ceases to be acceptable. Any implementation choice

that compromises the learning spine, even temporarily or for pragmatic reasons, reintroduces ambiguity that later stages of reform cannot correct. Where curriculum progression assumes mastery through a particular language, instruction must be aligned to that assumption rather than left to informal accommodation, as misalignment at this level displaces risk onto households and fragments the spine itself.

The second non-negotiable is assessment credibility. Assessment must verify mastery rather than simulate progress. This requirement applies not only to examination design, but also to marking standards, grading practices, and progression rules. When assessment is adjusted to restore familiar distributions or protect short-term stability, it ceases to function as a learning signal and reverts to a performance signal. At that point, the learning spine collapses, because classrooms, households, and labour markets respond to what is rewarded rather than what is intended. Restoring pass rates through marking adjustment after an initial dip may stabilise headlines, but it directly violates assessment credibility, even when framed as transitional or protective.

Assessment credibility applies uniformly across streams and boards. General, technical, and Madrasah streams are subject to the same mastery standards where learning objectives are equivalent. Separate certification pathways cannot be used to soften expectations, recalibrate difficulty, or manage political discomfort through differentiated grading norms. Stream differentiation cannot operate as a parallel route for absorbing enforcement pressure. Once assessment credibility diverges across boards, the learning spine fragments and household risk management intensifies.

The third non-negotiable is protected instructional time. Instructional time is the scarcest resource in the system and must be defended institutionally rather than left to individual discretion. Administrative directives, reporting requirements, and parallel initiatives cannot be permitted to erode classroom time, particularly in foundational stages. When instructional time is treated as flexible or residual, teachers are pushed back toward coverage, rehearsal, and examination preparation strategies that coherence was explicitly designed to displace.

The fourth non-negotiable is minimum professional standards. Once expectations are explicit and appropriate support is available, persistent instructional avoidance cannot be normalised or absorbed. Professional standards must be enforceable rather than symbolic. This does not imply uniform punishment or immediate sanction, but it does require that development, remediation, redeployment, and exit remain available and credible responses. A system that protects every incumbent regardless of performance ultimately sacrifices learning in order to preserve institutional comfort and stability.

The fifth non-negotiable is governance enforceability across institutional boundaries. Once coherence is established, learning standards must be enforceable not only within classrooms, but across the institutions that set curriculum, certify outcomes, supervise delivery, and render performance visible. Curriculum intent cannot be diluted at the point of assessment. Assessment standards cannot be disconnected from instructional expectations. Data visibility cannot exist without consequence.

Arbitration authority is therefore non-negotiable. Where curriculum intent, assessment standards, supervision findings, or performance data conflict, there must be a recognised locus of arbitration whose determinations are binding across institutions. Without this, sideways enforcement collapses into parallel interpretation at precisely the moment coherence begins to

bite. This Vision does not prescribe a new delivery agency. It requires a standing arbitration function mandated to issue published alignment rulings when contradictions arise between curriculum authorities, certification bodies, delivery directorates, and data systems. These rulings must be authoritative, transparent, and enforceable across institutional boundaries.

In the absence of such an arbiter, contradictions are resolved informally through delay, political escalation, or silent recalibration. Assessment bodies soften standards, supervision retreats to procedural compliance, and curriculum intent is diluted without formal decision. Naming the arbitration function closes this retreat path by making alignment decisions explicit, contestable, and binding. It is not an additional layer of governance, but the mechanism through which existing mandates are made coherent under pressure.

These non-negotiables are interdependent. Weakening any one of them places pressure on the others and accelerates retreat through reinterpretation rather than formal reversal. Protecting all five simultaneously is therefore not optional. It is the minimum condition for coherence to survive its first serious test under political and institutional pressure.

8.3 What Phasing Is Allowed to Mean

Phasing is necessary in a system of this scale, but it is also the most common vehicle for retreat. The distinction between sequencing and dilution is therefore not a matter of timing alone. It is a matter of leverage: which parts of the system are allowed to move first, which signals must remain fixed, and where pressure is absorbed when enforcement begins.

Phased enforcement means that direction is fixed while capability catches up. Core signals remain stable, while routines, support, and verification are introduced progressively. Expectations do not soften as capacity lags. Instead, the system concentrates effort on a small number of leverage points that anchor behaviour while other elements adjust around them. Timelines are explicit, transition periods are bounded, and the end state is not negotiable, even if the path to it is staged.

The critical leverage points are not evenly distributed. Curriculum priorities, assessment standards, and progression rules must stabilise early, because they shape classroom behaviour, household expectations, and market responses. Supervision practices, professional support, and enforcement intensity can then be phased in behind those fixed signals. When phasing respects this order, it builds capability without reopening settled principles. When it does not, ambiguity re-enters through interpretation rather than policy reversal.

Retreat, by contrast, uses the language of phasing to move the wrong levers. Instead of staging support and verification, it relaxes the signals that discipline behaviour. Timelines become elastic. Standards are reframed as provisional. Assessment is recalibrated to manage discomfort. Verification is postponed indefinitely. What was initially described as a transition quietly becomes a permanent exception, and coherence erodes not because it was rejected, but because it was never defended at the points of highest leverage.

Implementation logic must therefore specify not only when phasing occurs, but what phasing cannot touch. Phasing cannot be used to restore progression without mastery. It cannot be used to recalibrate assessment to preserve familiar pass-rate distributions. It cannot be used to defer minimum professional standards indefinitely once expectations and support are in place. It cannot be used to reintroduce initiative layering that fragments instructional focus and weakens accountability.

Phasing is a strategy for managing change under fixed commitments, not a licence to renegotiate the reform itself. When this distinction is enforced, sequencing concentrates pressure where it builds capability. When it is not, sequencing becomes the mechanism through which pressure is dissipated, and retreat occurs under the appearance of pragmatism.

8.4 Initiative Discipline and the Refusal of Layering

One of the most reliable ways coherence collapses is through initiative accumulation. New programmes are introduced to address visible problems, but existing routines remain untouched. Teachers and school leaders are asked to comply with multiple, partially overlapping expectations, and instructional focus fragments as actors hedge across competing signals. What appears as responsiveness functions as dilution.

Layering is not neutral. Each additional initiative competes for instructional time, reporting attention, and administrative compliance. When priorities multiply, enforcement weakens because no single signal can dominate behaviour. Actors respond rationally by doing a little of everything and committing fully to nothing. Coherence is lost not through resistance, but through overload.

Coherence therefore requires initiative discipline as a governing rule rather than a preference. This means fewer reforms, tighter routines, and explicit decisions about what stops when something new starts. It also requires resisting the temptation to treat every emerging problem as evidence that another programme is needed. Many implementation problems arise not because activity is insufficient, but because signals are unclear, contradictory, or weakly enforced.

The leverage point here is substitution, not addition. Any new action must replace something existing, not sit alongside it. When substitution is avoided, initiatives accumulate while enforcement dissipates. When substitution is enforced, the system becomes clearer even as activity narrows.

Initiative discipline applies equally to externally financed and technically assisted programmes. Development partners, consultants, and pilot-driven interventions have historically contributed to layering, parallel reporting systems, and fragmented accountability without strengthening learning enforcement. Under this Vision, external support is not exempt from coherence constraints. Financing, technical assistance, and innovation are acceptable only insofar as they reinforce the learning spine, assessment credibility, instructional time, and professional standards, rather than reopening settled questions through parallel agendas or exceptional arrangements.

Implementation logic must therefore impose a presumption against layering. Any proposed initiative must demonstrate how it strengthens the learning spine, how it aligns with assessment and protected instructional time, and which existing requirements it replaces or renders unnecessary. Initiatives that add reporting, monitoring, or instructional demands without displacing existing obligations weaken coherence regardless of their individual merits.

This discipline is politically difficult because it requires saying no to plausible, well-intentioned proposals. It requires refusing activity that signals responsiveness in favour of routines that sustain enforcement. Without this refusal, coherence becomes one initiative among many rather

than the organising principle of the system, and retreat occurs through accumulation rather than reversal.

8.5 Enforcement, Support, and the Order of Operations

A common failure mode in reform is the inversion of enforcement and support. Expectations are raised rhetorically, but support remains generic, episodic, or disconnected from classroom practice. When learning outcomes do not improve, enforcement is either intensified prematurely or abandoned altogether, producing cycles of pressure and retreat that undermine legitimacy.

Under coherence, the order of operations is not procedural detail. It is a condition of credibility. Expectations must be explicit before support can be targeted. Support must be available before enforcement is applied. Enforcement must follow evidence that expectations were clear and that meaningful support was provided. When this sequence is reversed, accountability appears arbitrary rather than principled, and resistance hardens even where reform intent is sound.

Implementation logic must therefore bind enforcement to conditions rather than to timelines alone. Where curriculum priorities are clear, assessment verifies mastery, and instructional support has been provided, enforcement is not punitive. It is a system obligation. Where clarity or support is absent, enforcement is not merely ineffective. It is illegitimate, because it shifts responsibility downward while ambiguity remains intact upstream.

The non-negotiables do not require immediate or uniform enforcement across the system. They require that enforcement remains credible and unavoidable over time. Credibility means that enforcement is known to be possible, not that it is constantly applied. Once enforcement is removed from the set of available responses, coherence becomes symbolic. Expectations may still be articulated, but they no longer carry consequence.

These non-negotiables are therefore not internal management preferences. They are public commitments intended to anchor scrutiny across institutions, professions, media, and society. Their function is to make retreat visible when pressure arrives, not to rely on discretion or goodwill. By naming what cannot be traded away, the Vision creates reference points against which future decisions can be judged, including decisions taken by leadership itself.

8.6 The Role of NLIF Within the Constitutional Logic

The National Learning Implementation Framework operates within this implementation logic. It does not define the non-negotiables, nor does it replace them. Its role is to sequence action while holding direction steady under pressure.

NLIF provides a structured path from clarity on paper to capability in practice. It sets out how routines are built, how professional support is phased, and how verification is introduced without overwhelming delivery institutions. In this sense, NLIF addresses capacity. It does not address commitment. That distinction is critical.

NLIF cannot compensate for retreat at the level of principle. If learning spine integrity is compromised, if assessment credibility is softened, or if enforcement is indefinitely postponed, no amount of sequencing can restore coherence. Sequencing can manage transition, but it cannot repair abandonment.

For this reason, NLIF should be read as a mechanism of protection rather than as a menu of options. Its authority derives from the non-negotiables, not the other way around. When pressure arrives, NLIF should be used to defend direction by managing how change unfolds, not to justify delay by reopening what has already been settled.

8.7 What Cannot Be Reopened

As reform progresses, pressure will repeatedly surface demands to revisit earlier decisions. These demands will often be framed as pragmatic, context-sensitive, or necessary for stability. They may be presented as temporary adjustments, transitional accommodations, or politically unavoidable corrections. Implementation logic must therefore be explicit about which questions are closed.

The integrity of the learning spine cannot be reopened in response to coverage anxiety or timetable pressure. Assessment credibility cannot be reopened to manage public discomfort with new result profiles or distributional shifts. Instructional time cannot be reopened to accommodate administrative convenience or initiative accumulation. Minimum professional standards cannot be reopened to preserve universal comfort when performance becomes visible.

Debate can and should continue about how these commitments are enacted. It cannot continue about whether they apply. Once this boundary blurs, coherence unravels rapidly, even if reform language remains intact. Retreat occurs not through explicit rejection, but through repeated reconsideration of what was meant to be settled.

Naming what cannot be reopened is therefore not rigidity. It is protection. It prevents the slow erosion of coherence through reinterpretation, delay, and exception that allows the system to appear stable while learning remains fragile.

8.8 Implementation Logic as a Test of Credibility

This chapter frames implementation not as a technical challenge, but as a test of credibility. Credibility is not established at launch, when momentum is high and expectations are abstract. It is established when enforcement produces discomfort and the system holds its ground.

The decisive moment will arrive when assessment outcomes shift, when familiar narratives break, and when pressure to restore the old equilibrium intensifies. At that point, implementation logic determines whether coherence survives or dissolves. The system will either defend learning integrity or reabsorb pressure by softening standards.

If non-negotiables are defended, instability can be absorbed and learning strengthened over time. If they are softened, stability is preserved temporarily while learning remains shallow and unequal. There is no neutral outcome. Where the Learning Compact defines mutual obligations among actors, this chapter defines the constraints within which those obligations must operate.

Chapters 5 and 6 showed what coherence requires. Chapter 7 showed why sustaining it is politically difficult. This chapter defines the governing rules that determine whether the system holds or retreats. The credibility of the Vision rests on whether these rules are treated as binding when they are most inconvenient. There is no technical fix for this choice. Only a governing one.

Chapter 9. Enabling Conditions for Learning

This chapter

- explains why learning reform fails when surrounding conditions operate out of alignment with learning expectations, even when curriculum, assessment, and teaching reforms are well designed.
- reframes health, nutrition, equity, digital capability, and pathways as system conditions whose sole function is to stabilise learning effort under enforcement, not as parallel social agendas.
- shows how readiness, inclusion, technology, and transitions can either reinforce the learning spine or become channels through which pressure is absorbed and standards are softened.
- establishes that equity strengthens coherence only when it protects progression without diluting expectations or creating parallel standards.
- argues that digital systems are core infrastructure for feedback, motivation, and trust, and that technology which adds load or substitutes for verification weakens reform.
- demonstrates that transitions and pathways are high-leverage signal points where inconsistent standards rapidly unravel upstream learning.
- concludes that enabling conditions must be governed as constraints, not alternatives, to prevent retreat through wellbeing, fairness, innovation, or flexibility narratives once enforcement begins.

Learning reform does not fail because curriculum, assessment, or teaching are misunderstood. It fails because the wider conditions that shape readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and coherence are allowed to operate out of alignment with learning expectations. When this happens, even well-designed reforms are slowly neutralised through pressure that enters from outside the classroom.

This chapter addresses the politically necessary domains that sit around the learning spine. It does not elevate them as parallel priorities, social agendas, or development programmes. It treats them as system conditions whose only legitimate purpose within this Vision is to stabilise learning effort and protect coherence once enforcement begins.

The governing question applied throughout is not whether these domains matter. It is how they behave**.** Each subsection therefore answers a single test: does this condition reinforce the learning spine and the five system dynamics described in Chapter 3, or does it provide an alternative pathway for absorbing pressure when learning expectations harden?

9.1 Health, Nutrition, and Readiness as Preconditions for Enforcement

Readiness is the most underestimated constraint on learning enforcement. It shapes whether instructional expectations can be held without inducing withdrawal, avoidance, or informal adaptation. Where readiness is weak, teachers do not reject standards explicitly. They adapt around them.

Health, nutrition, and emotional stability feed directly into the readiness–engagement loop described in Chapter 3. Hunger, illness, anxiety, and irregular attendance reduce cognitive bandwidth, weaken concentration, and fragment classroom routines. Over time, this pushes teachers toward survival strategies: slower pacing, repeated rehearsal, selective attention to stronger students, or informal lowering of expectations. These responses are rational under conditions of unstable readiness, but they quietly erode coherence.

The relevance of health and nutrition in this Vision is therefore not humanitarian framing, but system logic. These conditions matter because they determine whether enforcement is feasible without disproportionate strain on classrooms. When readiness is stabilised, instructional expectations can hold. When it is not, pressure to soften standards intensifies upstream.

This chapter therefore treats health and nutrition as learning stabilisers, not welfare add-ons. Their role is to protect attendance regularity, emotional regulation, and sustained engagement so that the learning spine can operate as designed. When they function in this way, they reinforce motivation and trust by making effort feel achievable. When they are treated as parallel social agendas disconnected from instructional routines, they fail to alter classroom dynamics and become another layer of activity without consequence. Readiness is not a marginal concern. It is a precondition for coherence under enforcement.

9.2 Equity and Inclusion as Protection Against Progression Failure

Equity in this Vision is defined narrowly and deliberately. It is not about symbolic access, representation, or parallel provision. It is about protecting progression through the learning spine for learners who face predictable disadvantage**.**

Inequity enters the system at identifiable pressure points: irregular attendance, language barriers, disability, poverty-related stress, geographic isolation, and early exit. These pressures weaken motivation, distort feedback, and increase the likelihood that learners fall behind early. When this occurs, systems face a choice: intensify support to protect progression, or lower expectations to preserve appearances.

Historically, the latter has been the path of least resistance. Learners are advanced without mastery, assessment is softened in the name of fairness, and inequity is managed through certification rather than learning. This reproduces disadvantage while allowing the system to claim inclusion.

This Vision explicitly rejects that path. Equity strengthens coherence only when it protects progression without diluting standards**.** Differentiation must occur in time, scaffolding, instructional support, and pacing. It must not occur through lowered expectations, alternative assessment norms, or silent exception.

When inclusion is governed in this way, it reinforces trust. Households see that effort pays off regardless of background. Motivation strengthens because learning remains meaningful. Feedback remains credible because standards do not shift by group or stream. When inclusion is governed otherwise, it becomes a channel through which pressure is absorbed and coherence fragments.

Equity, properly aligned, is therefore not a competing agenda. It is a condition for coherence to endure without reproducing inequality under new language.

9.3 Digital and Technology as a Core Coherence Infrastructure

In a system of Bangladesh's scale and heterogeneity, digital capability is not optional. It is a structural requirement for coherence. Its importance lies not in innovation or modernisation narratives, but in its ability to reduce variability, accelerate feedback, and lower cognitive and administrative load across the system.

Digital systems matter because they directly shape three of the five dynamics identified in Chapter 3: feedback, motivation, and trust.

First, digital infrastructure can radically shorten feedback loops. When learning progress, instructional gaps, and assessment outcomes become visible earlier and more reliably, corrective action can occur before failure becomes entrenched. Slow, noisy, or aggregated feedback forces enforcement to be blunt and politically costly. Faster, more granular feedback allows support to be targeted and enforcement to be proportionate.

Second, digital tools can reduce heterogeneity by anchoring shared instructional expectations. Structured lesson resources, diagnostic tools, and professional learning materials accessed through common platforms reduce reliance on uneven local capacity. This protects coherence while still allowing professional judgement within clear bounds.

Third, digital systems can strengthen trust by making system signals legible. When teachers understand what is expected, how learning is judged, and how support is triggered, motivation improves. When digital systems are opaque, duplicative, or primarily extractive, they undermine trust and provoke resistance.

The discipline is decisive. Technology must reduce load, not add it. Digital platforms that increase reporting, duplicate paperwork, or create parallel accountability channels weaken coherence. Technology that substitutes for pedagogy rather than supporting it invites superficial compliance and quiet withdrawal.

In this Vision, digital investment is justified only where it strengthens learning signals, accelerates feedback, and stabilises enforcement under scale. Treated otherwise, it becomes a high-profile mechanism for reform dilution.

9.4 Transitions, Pathways, and the Credibility of Signals Across the System

Transitions across years, stages, and streams are among the highest-leverage points in the system. They shape motivation by determining whether effort pays off. They shape trust by determining whether credentials mean the same thing across contexts. They shape feedback by signalling what the system actually values.

This is the only chapter where pathways are addressed explicitly, and the framing is deliberate. Pathways are not discussed in terms of employability slogans or aspiration narratives. They are treated as signal mechanisms that either reinforce or undermine the learning spine.

When transitions reward progression without mastery, upstream learning collapses. When alternative routes allow learners to bypass learning expectations, effort reallocates accordingly. Households respond rationally to perceived risk and reward, intensifying private tutoring or

steering children toward pathways with lower enforcement. Coherence unravels without any formal policy reversal.

This applies across general, technical, and Madrasah streams. Where learning objectives are equivalent, assessment credibility must be equivalent. Stream differentiation cannot operate as a parallel route for absorbing enforcement pressure. Once assessment norms diverge, the learning spine fragments and inequality intensifies through household risk management.

Transitions must therefore be governed to reinforce mastery, not relieve pressure. Choice remains possible, but it cannot function as an escape from learning expectations. Credential credibility is not an outcome of messaging. It is an outcome of enforcement consistency at transition points.

9.5 Enabling Conditions as a Managed System Ecology

Health, equity, digital capability, and pathways do not sit alongside the learning system. They form the ecology in which learning effort is either sustained or exhausted. Each condition interacts with the feedback loops described in Appendix B. When aligned, they reinforce readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and coherence. When misaligned, they become entry points for retreat.

The central risk is expansion without discipline. Enabling conditions are politically attractive because they signal care, inclusion, and modernisation. Without firm alignment to the learning spine, they accumulate as parallel agendas that dilute focus and weaken enforcement. The system becomes busy, not coherent.

This chapter therefore imposes a governing constraint: enabling conditions exist to stabilise learning enforcement, not to compete with it. They are legitimate only insofar as they protect the spine when pressure arrives.

This framing gives political leaders space to act without reopening foundational design choices. It allows attention to health, equity, technology, and pathways while holding learning integrity fixed. In doing so, it closes a common failure mode of reform: expanding support while quietly withdrawing standards.

9.6 Conditions, Not Alternatives: Political Insulation Against Retreat

This chapter does not expand the reform agenda. It constrains the ways in which pressure may legitimately be absorbed once enforcement begins. Health, equity, technology, and pathways are recognised here not as parallel priorities, compensatory programmes, or political offsets, but as conditions whose sole purpose is to stabilise learning effort and protect coherence under stress**.**

The distinction matters politically. When learning expectations harden, pressure rarely arrives in the language of curriculum or assessment. It arrives through appeals to wellbeing, fairness, innovation, flexibility, or future opportunity. These appeals are often sincere. They are also the most common vehicles through which coherence is softened without formal reversal.

This chapter therefore functions as insulation. It specifies that enabling conditions may not be used to justify lower standards, delayed enforcement, differentiated credibility, or parallel

certification routes. Health and nutrition cannot be invoked to excuse progression without mastery. Equity cannot be invoked to legitimise separate expectations. Technology cannot be invoked to substitute visibility for verification. Pathways cannot be invoked to absorb pressure through alternative credentials. Where any of these moves occur, they constitute retreat, regardless of intent.

Political leadership is thus protected rather than constrained by this framing. It provides a principled basis for responding to pressure without reopening foundational decisions. Leaders can invest in wellbeing, inclusion, digital systems, and transitions while holding learning integrity fixed. They can point to this chapter as evidence that support is being expanded, even as standards remain enforced.

This insulation is essential because reform rarely fails at the level of design. It fails when political actors are forced to choose between appearing responsive and sustaining coherence. By defining the terms on which responsiveness is permitted, this chapter removes that false choice. It makes clear that responsiveness is legitimate only when it reinforces the learning spine and the five system dynamics described in Chapter 3.

Taken together with Chapters 7 and 8, this chapter closes a critical loophole. It prevents the re-entry of ambiguity through adjacent agendas, well-intentioned accommodation, or symbolic action. It ensures that the conditions surrounding schools strengthen, rather than substitute for, learning enforcement.

Learning reform survives not because pressure disappears, but because the system knows where pressure is allowed to land. This chapter defines that boundary.

Chapter 10. System Learning, Adaptation, and Course Correction

This chapter

- defines system learning as a governance function rather than a technical or reflective exercise, and shows why unmanaged learning becomes a mechanism for avoiding enforcement rather than strengthening it.
- explains how adaptation, experimentation, and evidence have historically been absorbed defensively in Bangladesh through reinterpretation, delay, and parallel practice rather than authorised correction.
- distinguishes between safe-to-fail experimentation and evidence that must be unsafe to ignore, establishing inevitability of response as the core condition for meaningful learning.
- shows why pilots and innovation fail to reshape system behaviour when evidence lacks an institutional destination and authority to act on it.
- sets out a disciplined model of adaptation in which methods, supports, and routines may change, but mastery expectations, assessment credibility, and the learning spine cannot be reopened.
- examines how inconvenient evidence is neutralised in systems that retreat, and specifies how governed learning reallocates responsibility upward rather than dissipating pressure through ambiguity.
- concludes that governed learning is the final defence of coherence once enforcement produces disruption, and that systems either learn in ways that strengthen authority or retreat behind pragmatism and narrative management.

This chapter defines how the education system learns without losing coherence, authority, or credibility**.** It addresses a recurring failure in reform: when learning and adaptation become substitutes for enforcement rather than mechanisms for strengthening it.

No reform can anticipate all behavioural responses, institutional frictions, or contextual variation. Some adaptation is therefore necessary. However, adaptation is not neutral. In systems without clear governing rules, learning becomes a way to reopen settled decisions, defer accountability, or absorb pressure without visible retreat. Evidence circulates, pilots multiply, and reflection replaces decision, while core commitments quietly erode.

Bangladesh's education system has struggled to learn in ways that reinforce reform. New methods generate discomfort, threaten established interests, and expose uneven capacity. Imported models fail without contextualisation, while locally generated ideas lack institutional destinations. As a result, adaptation has tended to occur informally and defensively, through reinterpretation, delay, or parallel practice, rather than through authorised course correction.

This chapter establishes a disciplined logic for system learning. It specifies how experimentation can occur without fragmenting signals, how evidence can trigger tightening or redesign without loss of face, and how ideas can enter governance rather than circulate at the margins. Learning here is not openness for its own sake. It is a governed function, oriented toward strengthening the learning spine rather than renegotiating it.

In doing so, the chapter acts as an insurance policy against retreat disguised as learning. It ensures that adaptation works toward coherence, not away from it, and that correction strengthens authority rather than undermining it.

10.1 Why System Learning Is a Governance Problem, Not a Technical One

Education systems inevitably operate under uncertainty. Classrooms differ. Teacher capability varies. Communities face distinct constraints. Policies interact in ways that cannot be fully predicted at design stage. No reform, however well conceived, survives intact once it encounters daily practice.

The central question is therefore not whether adaptation is required, but how adaptation is authorised, constrained, and directed**.**

In Bangladesh, adaptation has historically occurred informally and defensively. When outcomes disappoint, explanations proliferate. Context is emphasised. Responsibility diffuses across institutions. Authority retreats behind complexity. This is not a failure of intelligence or effort. It is a rational response to incentives in a system where learning has no clear institutional destination.

When system learning is unmanaged, it becomes a mechanism for avoiding enforcement rather than improving it. Evidence circulates without consequence. Reviews accumulate without reallocation of responsibility. Reflection becomes performative rather than corrective. The system appears active and thoughtful while behaviour remains unchanged.

A coherent system requires a different settlement. Learning must be institutionalised, directional, and bounded**.** It must operate within fixed commitments rather than reopening them. Without these constraints, learning does not strengthen reform. It dissolves it.

10.2 From Projects to System Learning

Bangladesh does not lack experimentation. Across curriculum, assessment, teacher training, technology, nutrition, and service delivery, discrete initiatives have repeatedly demonstrated local success. Pilot programmes have improved attendance, raised short-term learning gains, and strengthened teacher practice in specific settings.

Yet these gains have rarely reshaped system-wide behaviour. The same problems reappear. New initiatives replicate old designs. Institutional routines remain largely unchanged. This pattern reflects not failure of innovation, but failure of learning loops.

Projects generate insights, but the system lacks routines that convert those insights into collective capability**.** Pilots end. Reports are produced. Lessons are acknowledged. Then the system resets. Knowledge remains local while authority remains static.

A learning system treats pilots differently. Pilots are not proof-of-concept exercises or political signals. They are diagnostic instruments**.** Their purpose is to reveal where institutional incentives break, where authority fails to travel, and where routines absorb pressure instead of correcting it.

For learning to scale, evidence must have an institutional destination. Someone must be authorised to interpret it. Someone must be required to act on it. Without this, pilots multiply while learning stagnates, and experimentation becomes insulation rather than adaptation.

10.3 Safe-to-Fail Experimentation, Unsafe-to-Ignore Evidence

A coherent system distinguishes clearly between experimentation and evidence. Experimentation must be safe to fail. Officials, teachers, and institutions must be able to test approaches without fear that every deviation will trigger sanction. Without this protection, risk aversion dominates. Innovation collapses into compliance. The system becomes brittle precisely where flexibility is needed.

Evidence, however, must be unsafe to ignore. Once an intervention has been tested, once patterns are visible, once outcomes repeat across contexts, the system must respond. At that point, continued inaction is no longer caution. It is retreat. The refusal to act on evidence becomes an active choice to preserve institutional comfort over learning integrity.

Bangladesh's administrative culture has often collapsed this distinction. Fear of blame suppresses experimentation, while fear of consequence neutralises evidence. The result is a system that neither innovates nor corrects. New methods are resisted, and old failures are tolerated.

Governed learning requires separating these functions. Freedom to test must coexist with inevitability of response. Only then can experimentation generate improvement rather than fatigue.

10.4 Local Adaptation Without Imported Illusion

Bangladesh cannot import education solutions wholesale. Pedagogies, technologies, and governance models developed elsewhere reflect different institutional histories, political settlements, and social expectations. Direct transplantation often produces surface compliance without functional change.

At the same time, Bangladesh cannot afford to reinvent solutions unnecessarily. Global evidence matters. Comparative experience matters. Ignoring it wastes time and resources.

System learning therefore serves a specific purpose: to translate global knowledge into local function**.** The task is not originality for its own sake, but fitness for context. The metaphor is not invention, but engineering. The wheel already exists. The challenge is to make it work on Bangladesh's roads.

This requires disciplined adaptation. Borrowed ideas must be tested against local feedback loops: readiness, motivation, trust, feedback, and coherence. What strengthens those dynamics should be adapted and scaled. What weakens them should be rejected, regardless of international endorsement or donor enthusiasm.

Innovation in this sense is not experimentation without anchor. It is selective adjustment in service of fixed learning goals. Without this discipline, innovation becomes theatre rather than transformation.

10.5 Learning, Data, and the Dual Role of Governance

Data and evidence do not serve learning alone. They also serve governance. In Bangladesh, data have historically been used primarily for compliance, surveillance, and distribution. This has shaped behaviour. Reporting becomes defensive. Indicators multiply. Measurement crowds out meaning. Learning recedes as institutions optimise for visibility rather than improvement.

A coherent system repurposes data without abandoning authority. Information must still support accountability, but it must also inform redesign. Evidence should not only reward and punish. It should clarify where routines fail, where incentives misfire, and where authority must intervene upstream rather than shifting pressure downward.

This learning function of governance is often overlooked. Many of the system's most important insights, including those documented in Appendix A and Appendix B, did not emerge from administration. They emerged from research. Ideas had to be generated before they could be governed.

A system that assumes ideas already exist governs blind. It enforces without understanding and retreats when enforcement produces unintended consequences. A learning state invests deliberately in idea generation, synthesis, and interpretation as part of its governing capacity.

10.6 Controlled Adaptation, Not Continuous Negotiation

Learning does not imply constant adjustment. Continuous renegotiation erodes credibility.

A coherent system distinguishes between parameters that are fixed and routines that are adaptable**.** Learning is permitted to redesign methods, supports, sequencing, and institutional processes. It is not permitted to reopen mastery expectations, assessment credibility, progression rules, or the learning spine itself.

When this boundary is unclear, adaptation becomes indistinguishable from retreat. Standards soften incrementally. Timelines stretch. Exceptions accumulate. Reform survives rhetorically while coherence dissolves operationally.

Controlled adaptation strengthens authority precisely because it signals that learning occurs within limits. The system listens, adjusts, and corrects, but it does not bargain with its own commitments. This balance is difficult, but essential. Without it, learning becomes the language through which authority abdicates responsibility.

10.7 Where Inconvenient Evidence Goes

The decisive test of system learning is not whether evidence exists, but what happens when it becomes inconvenient. In Bangladesh, inconvenient evidence has historically followed predictable paths. It is delayed until relevance fades. It is reframed as context-specific rather than systemic. It is displaced by new indicators that restore comfort. Or it is acknowledged rhetorically while routines remain unchanged. These responses are not accidental. They are institutional strategies for absorbing pressure without reallocating responsibility.

When learning outcomes threaten legitimacy, systems face a choice. They can tighten alignment and correct practice, or they can dissipate pressure through ambiguity. The latter is easier in the short run. It preserves institutional calm, protects informal settlements, and avoids visible disruption. But it also entrenches fragility. Over time, the system becomes dependent on narrative management rather than performance. Under coherence, this pathway must be closed.

Evidence that contradicts expectations must trigger a defined response chain. Data cannot circulate without destination. When assessment outcomes shift, when progression stalls, or when variation widens, the system must know in advance where that evidence goes, who interprets it, and what forms of adjustment are authorised. Without this, information accumulates while behaviour remains static, and learning collapses into documentation.

This does not imply automatic sanction or mechanical response. It implies inevitability of consequence. Sometimes the response will be tighter enforcement. Sometimes it will be redesign of support, sequencing, or institutional routines. Sometimes it will be retirement of practices that no longer serve learning. What matters is that evidence cannot simply be absorbed by time.

In systems that retreat, inconvenient evidence is managed until it disappears. In systems that learn, inconvenient evidence is governed until it produces adjustment.

10.8 Learning as the Final Defence Against Retreat

This chapter frames system learning not as a technical capability, but as the final defence of coherence when pressure intensifies.

Chapters 5 and 6 defined what coherence requires in classrooms and institutions. Chapter 7 showed why sustaining it is politically difficult once enforcement begins to bite. Chapter 8 established the non-negotiables that prevent retreat through reinterpretation. Chapter 9 set boundaries around enabling conditions so that support does not fragment the learning spine. This chapter completes the logic by addressing what happens when reality refuses to cooperate.

Every serious reform encounters moments where results destabilise familiar narratives. Pass rates dip. Variation becomes visible. Previously hidden weaknesses surface. At these moments, authority is tested. Systems either govern adaptation or retreat behind pragmatism.

If learning is weak or unmanaged, authority reacts defensively. Enforcement is softened. Standards are quietly recalibrated. Accountability is postponed. The system stabilises in appearance while learning remains shallow and unequal. Retreat occurs without announcement.

If learning is governed, authority holds. Evidence is allowed to reallocate responsibility upward. Adjustment occurs within fixed commitments. Discomfort is absorbed through redesign rather than denial. Coherence survives because the system learns without reopening what was meant to be settled.

There is no neutral path between these outcomes. Learning either strengthens authority or undermines it. Systems that cannot learn eventually rely on symbolism, coercion, or silence. Systems that can learn preserve legitimacy precisely because they are willing to adjust in the

open. Bangladesh does not require perfect plans or imported certainty. It requires a system capable of learning under pressure without losing direction, authority, or coherence. This chapter defines the conditions under which that is possible.

It is not a call for experimentation without limits, nor for flexibility without discipline. It is a statement that in a system committed to learning at scale, governed learning is not optional. It is the only mechanism through which coherence survives contact with reality.

Chapter 11. A National Compact for Learning and the Test of Credibility

This chapter

- argues that Bangladesh's learning crisis persists not because of weak intent, but because the system repeatedly avoided the political and institutional costs of enforcing learning integrity.
- defines a national compact that makes explicit, reciprocal demands on teachers, families, institutions, and the state once learning becomes visible and enforcement begins.
- sets out the state's core commitments, including non-withdrawal of coherence, preservation of assessment credibility, bounded phasing without exemption, and refusal to manage results for appearance.
- reframes state accountability as responsibility for protecting learning integrity over time, not merely expanding access, infrastructure, or certification.
- concludes that the Vision will be judged not by its analysis or ambition, but by whether coherence is defended when enforcement becomes politically uncomfortable.

This Vision has made a deliberate choice. It has described Bangladesh's education crisis not as a failure of effort or intention, but as the result of a stable equilibrium in which weak learning was tolerated, managed, and defended alongside expanding credentials and visible success. That equilibrium did not persist because problems were unknown. It persisted because confronting them carried political, institutional, and economic costs that the system repeatedly chose not to bear.

This final chapter sets out what it would take to break that equilibrium. It does not propose another programme, initiative, or reform layer. It defines the national compact required for coherence to survive once learning becomes visible, enforcement begins to bite, and familiar accommodations are no longer available.

11.1 What the System Is Asking For

If this Vision is taken seriously, it makes concrete demands of every actor in the system.

From teachers and school leaders, it asks for professional accountability under conditions of clarity. Expectations will be explicit. Progression without mastery will no longer be normalised. Instructional avoidance cannot be absorbed indefinitely once support is in place. This is not a demand for heroism, but for professionalism within a system that aligns curriculum, assessment, supervision, and support.

From families, it asks for tolerance of transition. As assessment credibility is restored, results may initially become more volatile. Familiar shortcuts may no longer work. Coaching markets will lose some of their protective value. This Vision asks families to accept short-term uncertainty in exchange for long-term integrity: credentials that once again mean learning, and pathways that do not require private risk management to navigate.

From institutions, it asks for something harder. It asks for a willingness to enforce standards even when doing so is costly. It asks institutions to resist the reflex to absorb pressure through delay, reinterpretation, or quiet adjustment. It asks them to place capable people where learning integrity requires them, not where convenience or patronage dictates. It asks them to allow evidence to reallocate responsibility upward, rather than pushing consequences downward onto classrooms and households.

These demands are uncomfortable by design. They challenge practices that have stabilised the system for decades.

11.2 What the State Commits in Return

A compact cannot be one-sided. If the system is asked to change behaviour, the state must bind itself to clear commitments.

First, coherence will not be withdrawn. Curriculum priorities, assessment standards, and progression rules will not be softened quietly when results become politically inconvenient. The learning spine will not be treated as provisional.

Second, assessment credibility will not be managed for appearances. Pass rates will not be restored through marking adjustment. Volatility will not be hidden through recalibration. When outcomes shift, the response will be support, enforcement, or redesign, not distortion.

Third, expectations will not be shifted back onto classrooms. When learning outcomes fall short, responsibility will not be displaced downward through blame or rhetoric. Evidence will be allowed to travel upward, triggering institutional correction where authority and resources actually sit.

Fourth, phasing will not mean exemption. Sequencing will be used to build capability, not to reopen settled commitments. Transition periods will be bounded. The end state will remain fixed.

Finally, governance will protect learning institutions from routine politicisation. Bodies responsible for curriculum, assessment, supervision, and certification will not be treated as sites for accommodation, patronage, or pressure absorption. Appointments, postings, and decisions that shape learning integrity will be governed accordingly, because without this constraint, no technical reform can survive.

These are not promises of perfection. They are promises of restraint.

11.3 Accountability of the State

Chapter 2 showed that weak learning persisted not because the system lacked rules, but because enforcement was selective and reversible. Authority was applied where it produced visible order and relaxed where it threatened stability or exposed uncomfortable truths.

This Vision insists on a different accountability settlement. The state will be accountable not only for expanding access, delivering infrastructure, or issuing credentials, but for protecting the integrity of learning outcomes over time. When learning fails, the response will not be symbolic action or narrative management. It will be governed adjustment.

This requires accepting that some practices must end. Quiet grade manipulation. Automatic progression to preserve calm. Appointments that weaken core institutions. Data used to perform upward and punish downward, but never to redesign. These practices are not neutral. They are how retreat has historically been managed. The compact requires that these escape routes be closed.

11.4 The Line That Will Not Be Crossed

Bangladesh does not lack ambition. It does not lack effort. It does not lack people who care.

What it has lacked is a credible commitment to protect learning from the everyday practices that undo reform while preserving surface stability. This Vision draws a clear line. Learning integrity will not be traded for administrative convenience or political comfort.

That line applies when assessment results destabilise familiar narratives. It applies when enforcement produces resistance. It applies when institutional routines are tested. It applies when pressure arrives to restore calm by softening standards, shifting responsibility, or diluting signals.

Ideas will need to be generated. Evidence will need to be interpreted. Adaptation will be necessary. But these will occur within fixed commitments, not at their expense. This is the test of credibility.

Bangladesh does not lack knowledge of its education crisis. It lacks a record of holding course when reform becomes politically uncomfortable. This Vision succeeds or fails not on its analysis or design, but on whether coherence is defended when resistance emerges and old accommodations become tempting. There is no technical fix for this choice. Only a governing one.

Appendix A: System diagnosis: why schooling has expanded but learning has not

This appendix consolidates the diagnostic evidence that underpins the reform priorities set out in the Vision and Implementation Framework. It draws together system-wide reviews, administrative statistics, sector performance reporting, and independent monitoring to provide a grounded account of how Bangladesh's education system currently functions in practice.

The purpose of this appendix is not to restate policy aspirations or reform intent. Throughout this appendix, 'learning' refers to demonstrable mastery of foundational literacy and numeracy, the ability to reason and apply knowledge, and the development of transferable skills required for progression to further education, work, and civic participation. The appendix documents observed patterns in learning outcomes, system behaviour, and implementation performance, and identifies the institutional arrangements and incentive dynamics that help explain why sustained expansion in schooling has not translated into commensurate gains in learning.

Several aspects of the diagnosis touch on politically and institutionally sensitive areas, including governance, accountability, assessment credibility, and resource use. For this reason, the analysis is explicitly evidence-led and triangulated across multiple system-facing sources, rather than relying on any single report or study. Where political incentives and public signalling are discussed, they are treated as analytical features of system behaviour rather than as normative judgements about individual actors.

At the same time, the diagnosis recognises a harder pattern that emerges across multiple sources: the system did not only tolerate weak learning. Over time, it frequently managed around it, using administrative discretion, assessment design, and public signalling to stabilise politically salient outcomes even as independent learning evidence remained weak**.** Success was often produced through visible proxies (coverage, infrastructure, enrolment, headline results), while the integrity of learning signals and the discipline of follow-through remained weak. In periods where learning evidence was persistently poor, the system's most reliable consequences were attached to administrative outputs, compliance, and politically salient indicators. This created space for discretion in enforcement, assessment stringency, and reporting standards, and it enabled rent-bearing behaviours to stabilise in predictable places, including examinations, tutoring markets, and local resource chains.

<u>Evidence base and citation conventions</u>

The diagnosis in this appendix relies primarily on a small set of system-wide sources that are cited repeatedly across sections because they provide one or more of the following:
(a) national coverage,
(b) official administrative or sector reporting, or
(c) independent monitoring at scale.

For readability and consistency, each core source is assigned a short title that is used throughout the appendix.

1. **White Paper**
   White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy: Dissection of a Development Narrative (2025), Chapter 14 (Education)

2. **Task Force Report**
   Re-strategising the Economy and Mobilising Resources for Equitable and Sustainable Development (2025)
3. **Consultation Committee Report**
   Consultation Committee Report on Primary and Mass Education (2025)
4. **BANBEIS 2023 Statistics**
   Bangladesh Education Statistics 2023 (published 2024)
5. **ASPR 2022–2023**
   Annual Sector Performance Report: Education Sector (2022; 2023)
6. **Education Watch**
   Education Watch reports (multiple rounds, CAMPE)

These sources are used because they recur across national policy discussion and collectively cover the core dimensions required for system diagnosis: learning outcomes, assessment and credential signals, resourcing and financing, governance and accountability, service delivery performance, and equity and stratification.

Other studies and specialised analyses (including governance micro-studies and programme-specific evaluations) are used selectively to illuminate mechanisms or confirm patterns and are footnoted locally when introduced. They are not treated as primary system diagnostics.

How to read this diagnosis

Appendix A is structured as a system diagnosis, not a thematic literature review. Each section examines a core subsystem of education delivery and traces how observed outcomes emerge from the interaction between policy design, institutional arrangements, incentives, and behaviour at scale.

The diagnosis proceeds in six linked parts:

- **A1.1 Learning foundations, classroom practice, and progression**
  Examines how early readiness gaps, weak foundational learning, and classroom realities interact to produce cumulative learning deficits across grades.
- **A1.2 Assessment, credentials, and learning signals**
  Analyses how public examinations, grading practices, and integrity failures shape behaviour, distort incentives, and weaken the signalling value of credentials.
- **A1.3 Governance failures, incentives, and resource leakages**
  Examines how fragmented authority, weak accountability, and low-powered enforcement affect teacher effort, supervision, and resource use.
- **A1.4 Education financing, expenditure efficiency, and cost shifting**
  Assesses both the level and composition of public spending, and how weak linkage between finance and learning outcomes has shifted effective costs onto households.
- **A1.5 Equity and inclusion**
  Diagnoses how poverty, gender, geography, disability, and language interact to produce cumulative disadvantage in participation, learning, and progression.
- **A1.6 Education streams and stratification**
  Analyses how parallel education streams function as stratified pathways with unequal learning conditions, credentials, and mobility.

Across sections, the diagnosis emphasises patterns rather than isolated failures. Weak learning outcomes, assessment volatility, governance leakage, household risk management, and stream stratification are treated as mutually reinforcing features of the current system equilibrium, not as independent problems.

Where possible, claims are triangulated across administrative data, independent assessments, household surveys, and sector performance reporting. Where evidence is incomplete or uneven, this is made explicit. The aim is not attribution of blame, but identification of the structural constraints and incentive dynamics that any credible reform agenda must address.

Taken together, Appendix A provides the empirical and analytical foundation for the Vision and Implementation Framework. It explains not only what is not working**,** but why, and therefore clarifies where reform effort is most likely to unlock sustained improvements in learning.

A1 Learning foundations, classroom practice, and progressions.

This section examines how learning foundations, classroom practice, and progression interact to shape student outcomes across the school cycle. It traces how early readiness gaps emerge before school entry, how weak foundations persist through primary and lower secondary education, and how day-to-day instructional practices and curriculum pressures reinforce these patterns over time.

Taken together, the evidence highlights a system in which students progress through grades without consistent mastery, as classroom realities, instructional time constraints, and curriculum design combine to widen learning gaps rather than close them.

A1.1 School readiness and pre-primary foundations

Learning gaps in Bangladesh do not begin in Grade 1. They begin before school starts, and the evidence indicates that early-childhood access and developmental readiness remain structurally constrained relative to the size of the cohort. A recent joint study by the Department of Primary Education and UNICEF[2] shows that of the 11.3 million children aged 3–5 in Bangladesh, only 3.5 million receive early learning opportunities across all school types. Similarly, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data indicate that only 18.9 per cent of children aged 3–5 are accessing early learning programmes, while 25.5 per cent are not developmentally on track.

Policy intent exists, as shown by the launch of a pilot in 3,214 government primary schools in 2023, but implementation readiness is uneven. Crucially, the feasibility study finds that "availability" at the policy level did not automatically translate into enrolment at the community level: in piloting school catchment areas, enrolment was 16.6 per cent for children aged 4+ and 27.6 per cent for children aged 5+. The study also documents constraints that matter directly for readiness outcomes, including shortages of qualified teachers, gaps in age-appropriate WASH and learning or play materials, and uneven community understanding of play-based pedagogies, all of which reduced enrolment and engagement.

These constraints imply that the system is attempting to deliver primary schooling to a cohort in which many children begin formal learning without consistent prior exposure to structured

[2] DPE & UNICEF. (2025) Study on the Feasibility of Scale-up of the Two-year Pre-primary Education in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh, Government of Bangladesh and UNICEF.

early learning routines, language-rich interaction, and age-appropriate foundational development. Readiness is therefore not only an "early years" issue but a delivery design problem: when early learning provision is thin, uneven, or perceived as low value, the system inherits avoidable heterogeneity in readiness at the start of primary school. This heterogeneity then amplifies classroom difficulty in the early grades and contributes to widening learning gaps as children progress through the system

A1.2 Foundational learning outcomes and progression from primary to lower secondary

Evidence from national assessments shows that a large share of students complete primary education without mastering foundational competencies, and that these gaps persist into lower secondary education. The National Student Assessment at Grade 5 provides the clearest benchmark of learning at the end of primary school. In the 2017 cycle, only 44 percent of students achieved grade-level proficiency in Bangla, while 35 percent achieved expected proficiency in mathematics (NSA 2017)[3]. The 2022 cycle shows no meaningful improvement in Bangla and a decline in mathematics proficiency to around 30 percent, despite five additional years of policy reform and investment (NSA 2022)[4]. This implies that roughly two-thirds of students complete primary school without grade-level numeracy, and more than half without grade-level literacy.

Similarly, household-based assessments reinforce the scale of the problem. Education Watch reports from 2022 and 2024 show that approximately 50 percent of students in Grades 3 and 5 are unable to read a Grade 2-level text fluently, and between 45 and 55 percent cannot correctly perform basic two-digit subtraction. These findings indicate that weak learning is not confined to assessment samples but is visible at household and classroom level.

Lower secondary assessments show that these deficits are not systematically remediated. The National Assessment of Secondary Students at Grade 8 reports that a majority of students fail to meet expected competency thresholds in mathematics and science, particularly on items requiring reasoning rather than recall. In mathematics, fewer than ~ 40 percent of students demonstrate competency aligned with grade expectations, and performance drops sharply on multi-step or applied questions.

This learning bottleneck coincides with rising dropout. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that while survival to Grade 5 exceeds 85 percent, dropout accelerates in lower secondary education. By Grade 10, cumulative dropout exceeds 30 percent, with the steepest losses occurring between Grades 8 and 10. These patterns are consistent with assessment evidence showing that students struggle to cope with increased curricular abstraction in the absence of secure foundational learning.

By higher secondary education, learning gaps have largely hardened. Reviews conducted in the Task Force Report and reflected in other national policy analysis note that many students reaching Grade 12 lack proficiency in analytical writing, problem-solving, and independent learning, even when they pass public examinations. Employers and tertiary institutions consistently report that new entrants require remediation in basic reasoning and communication skills.

[3] National Student Assessment 2017 (Grades 3 and 5). Government of Bangladesh.
[4] National Student Assessment 2022 (Grades 3 and 5). Government of Bangladesh.

Recent examination cycles provide additional confirmation. Where grading practices were less accommodative, pass rates and grade distributions fell sharply, revealing gaps in student preparedness rather than sudden deterioration in cohort ability. These outcomes suggest that earlier examination performance overstated learning achievement and masked accumulated deficits. Detailed analysis of assessment credibility and inflation is presented in the following section, but the learning evidence here indicates that weak results reflect long-standing gaps rather than short-term shocks.

Taken together, the evidence shows that Bangladesh's education system enables grade progression without ensuring mastery at key transition points. Weak foundations at the end of primary school persist into lower secondary education, and by higher secondary level many students remain under-prepared for the cognitive demands of further study or skilled employment.

A1.3 Classroom practice and instructional time

Evidence from classroom observations and administrative data indicates that weak learning outcomes are closely linked to how instruction is organised and delivered on a day-to-day basis. Across primary and lower secondary classrooms, teaching practices prioritise syllabus completion and examination preparation over mastery, while effective instructional time is substantially lower than implied by official timetables.

Education Watch classroom observations conducted across multiple rounds show that rote-based practices dominate the majority of observed lessons. In typical primary classrooms, a large share of instructional time is devoted to copying from the board, choral repetition, and mechanical exercises aligned to anticipated examination questions. Activities associated with effective foundational learning, including guided reading, structured problem-solving, discussion, and formative feedback, are observed far less frequently. Across observation rounds, fewer than one in three lessons include any sustained opportunity for students to explain reasoning or receive individual feedback.

These instructional patterns persist across school types and regions. Importantly, they are observed not only in poorly resourced schools but also in schools with adequate buildings and textbook supply. This suggests that pedagogy is shaped primarily by system incentives and assessment pressures rather than by material shortages alone.

Effective instructional time is further constrained by teacher absence and non-teaching demands. Education Watch unannounced school visits report teacher absence rates ranging from 15 to 25 percent, with higher absence in rural areas, char regions, and urban informal settlements. In schools with fewer teachers, the absence of even one teacher results in class cancellations or ad hoc supervision, further reducing learning time.

When teachers are present, a significant proportion of the school day is absorbed by administrative and non-instructional tasks. Sector performance reporting further confirms these constraints. The Annual Sector Performance Reports (ASPR) for 2022 and 2023 record repeated disruptions to instructional time arising from non-teaching assignments, emergency response activities, and administrative directives issued through multiple channels. While these disruptions are treated as operational issues in sector reporting, their cumulative effect is to reduce effective teaching time and reinforce coverage-oriented pedagogy. The Consultation Committee Report similarly documents that teachers and head teachers are frequently engaged

in data reporting, stipend administration, examination logistics, and other tasks assigned by multiple authorities. As a result, the actual time devoted to focused instruction falls well below scheduled instructional hours, particularly in government primary and secondary schools.

Large class sizes amplify these constraints. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that pupil–teacher ratios in government primary schools commonly exceed 40 students per teacher, and exceed 50 students per teacher in many disadvantaged locations. In classrooms of this size, even motivated teachers face severe limits on their ability to monitor individual learning, diagnose misconceptions, or provide corrective feedback. As a result, instruction defaults to whole-class methods that privilege coverage over understanding.

Multi-grade teaching remains widespread in remote and hard-to-reach areas. BANBEIS 2023 statistics and Education Watch fieldwork indicate that a significant share of rural primary schools operate with multi-grade classrooms, often without specialised training or materials to support such teaching arrangements. This further reduces effective instructional time per grade and increases reliance on self-directed copying and repetition.

Curriculum pacing pressures reinforce these patterns. Teachers report strong expectations to complete prescribed syllabi within fixed timeframes, regardless of student readiness. Following COVID-19 school closures, curricula were largely reinstated without systematic prioritisation or catch-up sequencing, despite evidence of learning loss. Under these conditions, teachers rationally prioritise coverage of examinable content, even when large numbers of students have not mastered prerequisite skills.

Taken together, the evidence shows that students receive significantly less effective instruction than policy frameworks assume. Reduced instructional time, large class sizes, rote-dominated pedagogy, and administrative overload interact to constrain learning, particularly for students who enter classrooms with weak foundations. Without changes to how instructional time is protected and used, improvements in curriculum or assessment design alone are unlikely to translate into better learning outcomes.

A1.4 Classroom conditions and curriculum pressures across grades

Curriculum expectations and classroom conditions interact to shape what teachers are realistically able to deliver. Evidence from national reviews, administrative data, and field-based studies shows that dense syllabi, limited prioritisation of foundational competencies, and sharp transitions in cognitive demand place sustained pressure on instructional practice. These pressures intensify as students move through the system, particularly in contexts characterised by large classes, limited instructional time, and shortages of subject-qualified teachers.

Primary education (Grades 1–5)

At primary level, curriculum density relative to available instructional time is a recurring concern. The Consultation Committee Report documents that the prescribed primary syllabus requires teachers to cover a wide range of content each year, with limited guidance on prioritisation when students fall behind. In practice, this places pressure on teachers to move through material at pace, even when a substantial share of students have not mastered prerequisite skills.

The White Paper reinforces this diagnosis, noting that the primary curriculum places insufficient emphasis on consolidation of foundational literacy and numeracy in the early grades, particularly in Grades 1 and 2. Where remediation mechanisms exist, they are not systematically embedded in classroom routines. As a result, students who fall behind early are carried forward without targeted support, contributing to the accumulation of learning gaps observed at the end of primary school.

Classroom conditions amplify these curriculum pressures. Large class sizes and limited instructional time reduce opportunities for teachers to slow down instruction or revisit earlier content. Under these constraints, coverage-oriented teaching becomes a rational response to syllabus expectations, reinforcing rote practices documented in classroom observations.

Lower secondary education (Grades 6–8)

Curriculum pressures intensify at the transition to lower secondary education. The White Paper and the Task Force Report both highlight a sharp increase in abstraction and content load beginning in Grades 6 to 8, particularly in mathematics and science (White Paper; Task Force Report). Students are expected to shift rapidly from basic operations to algebraic reasoning, and from factual recall to conceptual understanding, often without sufficient bridging or diagnostic support.

This transition coincides with evidence of weak foundational learning at the end of primary school. As a result, many students enter lower secondary education without the literacy and numeracy required to engage meaningfully with the curriculum. Education Watch classroom observations at lower secondary level indicate continued reliance on whole-class instruction and memorisation, with limited adaptation to varied student readiness.

Teacher deployment patterns further constrain delivery. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that shortages of subject-qualified teachers in mathematics, science, and English are concentrated in rural and disadvantaged schools. Where subject specialists are unavailable, teachers are often required to teach outside their area of training, reducing instructional depth precisely at the stage when curricular demands increase most sharply.

Higher secondary education (Grades 11–12)

At higher secondary level, curriculum demands remain dense and examination-oriented. The Task Force Report notes that syllabi at Grades 11 and 12 prioritise coverage of examinable content, leaving limited space for extended problem-solving, analytical writing, or independent inquiry. While assessments require demonstration of higher-order skills, classroom instruction remains constrained by time pressure and syllabus breadth.

The White Paper further observes that higher secondary curricula are weakly aligned with the competencies required for tertiary education and skilled employment, particularly in areas such as critical reasoning, applied knowledge, and communication. As a result, many students complete higher secondary education having met formal curriculum requirements without developing the skills expected at the next stage of education or work.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges. Despite documented learning losses during prolonged school closures, curriculum expectations at lower and higher secondary levels were largely reinstated without systematic compression or reprioritisation (White Paper;

Task Force Report). Teachers reported pressure to complete the syllabus within shortened effective school years, reinforcing surface learning strategies and limiting opportunities for remediation.

Language of instruction compounds curriculum difficulty across grades. In multilingual regions, students are required to engage with increasingly abstract content in Bangla or English, even when these are not their home languages. Evidence cited in national reviews indicates that this reduces comprehension and participation, particularly in science and mathematics at lower secondary level (White Paper).

Diagnostic domain	Indicator	Magnitude / pattern	Source
School readiness	Children 3–5 accessing ECE	18.9%	DPE–UNICEF / MICS
School readiness	Children not developmentally on track	25.5%	DPE–UNICEF / MICS
Foundations	Grade 5 Bangla proficiency	~44%	NSA 2017
Foundations	Grade 5 mathematics proficiency	~35% → ~30%	NSA 2017–2022
Foundations	Early grade skill failure (Grades 3–5)	~50%	Education Watch
Progression	Grade 8 math/science competence	<40%	NASS
Progression	Cumulative dropout by Grade 10	>30%	BANBEIS 2023
Classroom practice	Rote-dominated instruction	Majority	Education Watch
Classroom practice	Lessons with feedback	<30%	Education Watch
Teacher availability	Absence (unannounced)	15–25%	Education Watch
Staffing	PTR >40:1	Widespread	BANBEIS 2023
Staffing	Subject-teacher shortages	Concentrated in disadvantaged areas	BANBEIS 2023
Curriculum pressure	Transition shock (Grades 6–8)	Sharp increase in abstraction without bridging or remediation	White Paper; Task Force
System response	Post-COVID curriculum reprioritisation	Minimal	White Paper; Task Force

Table A1.1 Evidence on learning foundations, classroom constraints, and progression

Taken together, the evidence shows that curriculum design and pacing are misaligned with classroom realities across the school cycle. Dense syllabi, abrupt transitions in cognitive demand, shortages of subject-qualified teachers, and limited flexibility to adapt content to student readiness reinforce instructional practices that prioritise coverage over mastery. These pressures accumulate across grades, making it increasingly difficult for students who fall behind to recover as they progress through the system

A1.5 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Learning deficits begin before school entry.**
   A majority of children enter Grade 1 without consistent exposure to structured early learning. Pre-primary access remains limited relative to cohort size, and utilisation is substantially lower than policy availability, producing wide variation in school readiness at the point of entry.
2. **Foundational learning outcomes remain persistently weak.**
   Fewer than half of students achieve grade-level literacy, and roughly one-third achieve grade-level numeracy, by the end of primary school. These outcomes have shown little improvement across successive national assessment cycles, indicating a structural rather than transitional problem.
3. **Learning gaps widen rather than close as students progress.**
   Weak foundations at the end of primary school are not remediated in lower secondary education. Grade 8 assessment evidence shows continued underperformance in mathematics and science, particularly on tasks requiring reasoning rather than recall, coinciding with rising dropout.
4. **Grade progression frequently occurs without mastery.**
   Students advance through key transition points despite significant learning gaps. By higher secondary level, many students who pass public examinations lack readiness in analytical writing, problem-solving, and independent learning, revealing a growing divergence between credentials and actual competence.
5. **Classroom instruction is constrained by incentives and conditions.**
   Teaching practice is dominated by syllabus coverage and rote methods, while effective instructional time is substantially lower than scheduled time due to teacher absence, administrative burden, large class sizes, and multi-grade teaching. These constraints make mastery-oriented instruction difficult to sustain.
6. **Curriculum design and pacing are misaligned with classroom realities.**
   Dense syllabi, limited prioritisation of foundational competencies, and sharp increases in abstraction at lower secondary level place sustained pressure on teachers and students. Post-pandemic reinstatement of curricula without systematic reprioritisation has reinforced surface learning strategies.
7. **Teacher supply and deployment constraints amplify learning gaps.** High pupil–teacher ratios and shortages of subject-qualified teachers (particularly in mathematics, science, and English in rural and disadvantaged areas) reduce instructional attention and make curriculum transitions harder to manage.

A2 Assessment, credentials, and learning signals

Assessment is the main mechanism through which Bangladesh's education system allocates progression and opportunity. Public examinations shape not only transitions between levels, but also the daily behaviour of teachers, students, school leaders, and households. The evidence reviewed here shows that the system's assessment signals have been weakened by a combination of grade inflation, integrity failures, and a growing reliance on household expenditure to manage risk. These dynamics encourage credential seeking over mastery and reduce the extent to which exam results can be interpreted as stable evidence of learning.

A2.1 Signal dilution through grade inflation and divergence from learning evidence

A central diagnostic problem is the growing separation between examination outcomes and independent measures of learning. The National Student Assessment 2022 reports that ~50% of Grade 5 students are "proficient and above" in Bangla, while only ~30% of Grade 5 students are "proficient and above" in mathematics. These levels are not consistent with a system in which most students are mastering grade-level competencies.

In contrast, public examination indicators have historically presented a much more optimistic picture. The White Paper documents a long-run increase in SSC success and top grades, noting that the average SSC pass rate rose from 35.22% (2001) to 83.04% (2024), while the number of students securing GPA-5 increased to 1,63,845 (2024). These figures illustrate a steep improvement in credentials over time, but they sit alongside persistently low proficiency measured independently by NSA, particularly in mathematics.

This divergence matters because it weakens the interpretability of results. When formal exam outcomes rise sharply while independently measured proficiency remains modest, grades become less reliable signals of mastery. That uncertainty then becomes a system driver in its own right, shaping how households and schools respond.

A2.2 The 2025 SSC and HSC "correction" and what it reveals about discretion

Recent examination cycles show how sensitive outcomes can be to decisions about marking stringency, moderation, and enforcement. In SSC 2025, national reporting indicates a sharp fall in outcomes compared with the previous year. The pass rate fell to 68.45% and GPA-5 fell to 139,032, compared with 83.03% pass rate and 182,129 GPA-5 in 2024. The same pattern appears at the higher secondary level. For HSC 2025, bdnews24 reports a pass rate of 58.83% and 69,097 GPA-5, compared with 77.78% pass rate and 145,911 GPA-5 in 2024, implying an 18.95 percentage point year-on-year drop in pass rates and a decline of 76,814 in GPA-5 recipients.

Analytically, this volatility is important for diagnosis. A shift of this scale cannot plausibly be explained by changes in curriculum or classroom instruction within a single year. It indicates that examination outcomes are highly responsive to administrative discretion and enforcement regimes. This does not remove learning as the underlying problem. It instead shows that the public examination system has been capable of producing very different headline outcomes under different rules of stringency, which reinforces the broader concern about the stability and credibility of assessment signals.

A2.3 Integrity failures and weak credibility of the exam system

A second diagnostic problem is that assessment credibility is repeatedly undermined by integrity failures. The White Paper contains a dedicated discussion of "Question paper Leakage in Public Exams" and notes that the tendency allegedly became rampant after 2014, including regular leakage claims involving public examinations and admission tests. While the White Paper discussion is not primarily presented as a statistical series, it clearly treats leakage as recurrent rather than exceptional and ties it to systemic vulnerabilities (paper setting, distribution, intermediaries, and weak accountability).

The Task Force Report is more prescriptive but diagnostic in what it implies. It explicitly calls for ending "auto pass" provisions and for stopping question paper leaks, stating that "no auto pass should be allowed" and pointing to the need for action against those involved in leakage.

This is a strong signal that system actors view integrity and enforcement weaknesses as sufficiently serious to warrant explicit prohibition, not incremental adjustment.

Where integrity is uncertain, households and schools rationally treat examinations as high-stakes contests with uncertain rules, rather than as credible measurement. This is one of the mechanisms through which the system shifts away from learning and toward risk management.

A2.4 Political economy of assessment: discretion, shadow markets, and signal control

The assessment system does not only measure learning. It organises incentives, distributes advantage, and creates opportunities for extraction where stakes are high and governance is weak. The diagnostic evidence suggests three mechanisms that matter for system behaviour.

First, examination outcomes have been demonstrably sensitive to choices about marking stringency, moderation, and enforcement. Large year-to-year shifts in pass rates and top grades are analytically difficult to reconcile with gradual changes in classroom instruction. The more plausible interpretation is that administrative discretion has been able to expand or tighten success thresholds, which weakens the credibility of results as stable learning signals and increases uncertainty for households. This discretion did not operate in an informational vacuum. Independent assessments, employer feedback, and sector reviews consistently indicated weak mastery, yet enforcement choices repeatedly favoured visible stability over learning credibility.

Second, where credibility is weak and stakes remain high, a parallel "shadow assessment" economy grows. The White Paper identifies the way question leakage and compromised integrity interact with coaching and guidebook markets, including a reported nexus between question setters and coaching centres, and the downstream role of guides and private coaching as strategies for managing a high-risk contest rather than building mastery. In such conditions, tutoring functions less as enrichment and more as insurance.

Third, these dynamics create a self-protecting equilibrium. If high-stakes assessment remains the dominant pathway to progression, and if system credibility is periodically threatened, the political and institutional incentive is often to restore visible stability through controllable outputs rather than confront the harder work of rebuilding assessment integrity and classroom learning. This strengthens a cycle in which learning remains secondary to signal management, and households rationally increase private spend.

This political economy framing is not an allegation about every actor. It is a description of the incentive landscape that emerges when high-stakes signals, weak credibility, and discretionary enforcement coexist. It also helps explain why reforms that aim to reduce examination dominance often face organised resistance from groups whose income, influence, or legitimacy depends on the old regime.

A2.5 Household risk management: private coaching as a shadow assessment system

The weakening of assessment signals is reflected most clearly in household behaviour. When examination outcomes become volatile, inflated, or weakly linked to demonstrated learning, households respond by treating formal assessment as a high-stakes risk event rather than a

reliable measure of mastery. Private tutoring and coaching emerge in this context as a shadow assessment system that households use to manage uncertainty.

Education Watch data illustrate the scale of this response. In 2022, average annual household expenditure on education was BDT 13,882 for primary students and BDT 27,340 for secondary students, with private tutoring and coaching forming the single largest cost component in both cases. In the first six months of 2023 alone, households had already spent 62 per cent (primary) and 83 per cent (secondary) of their previous full-year education expenditure, indicating rapidly rising investment in examination preparation.

Analytically, these patterns are best understood as risk insurance. When grading standards, moderation practices, and enforcement regimes shift from year to year, households cannot infer future outcomes from past performance. Tutoring therefore becomes a hedge against uncertainty, designed to secure credentials under unpredictable assessment conditions rather than to complement classroom learning.

This behaviour reinforces credential-seeking over mastery. Coaching aligns tightly to anticipated examination formats, marking schemes, and question patterns, further narrowing the curriculum and strengthening rote strategies. Over time, this weakens the signalling function of examinations even further, creating a feedback loop in which assessment instability drives greater private investment, which in turn entrenches teaching to the test.

The implications for assessment credibility are profound. When progression increasingly depends on private risk management rather than demonstrable learning, public examinations lose their role as transparent, system-wide signals of competence. The financing and equity consequences of this shift are examined separately in A1.4.

Diagnostic domain	Indicator	Magnitude / pattern	Source
Learning signal at end of primary	Grade 5 Bangla proficiency (“proficient and above”)	~50% of students	National Student Assessment 2022
Learning signal at end of primary	Grade 5 mathematics proficiency (“proficient and above”)	~30% of students	National Student Assessment 2022
Credential expansion over time	SSC average pass rate	Increased from 35.22% (2001) to 83.04% (2024)	Education White Paper
Top-grade expansion	SSC GPA-5 recipients	1,63,845 students in 2024	Education White Paper
Signal divergence	Exam outcomes vs independent learning	Credentials rise while mastery remains modest	NSA; White Paper (triangulated)
Examination volatility (SSC)	SSC pass rate and GPA-5 count	Pass rate 68.45%; GPA-5 139,032 in 2025, sharp decline from 2024	Ministry Admin Data
Examination volatility (HSC)	HSC pass rate and GPA-5 count	Pass rate 58.83%; GPA-5 69,097 in 2025 (–18.95 pp YoY)	Ministry Admin Data
Administrative discretion	Sensitivity of outcomes to enforcement	Large year-on-year swings under different marking regimes	Media synthesis; policy analysis
Integrity risk	Question paper leakage	Treated as recurrent, system-level problem	Education White Paper

Enforcement weakness	Auto-pass provisions	Explicit call to abolish auto pass	Task Force Report
Household risk response	Primary education expenditure	BDT 13,882 annually; tutoring largest cost item	Education Watch 2023
Household risk response	Secondary education expenditure	BDT 27,340 annually; tutoring dominant	Education Watch 2023
Cost acceleration	Six-month expenditure vs annual (secondary)	83% of previous full-year cost spent in six months	Education Watch 2023
Shadow assessment system	Role of private coaching	Coaching functions as progression insurance under weak signals	Education Watch; triangulated

Table A1.2 Evidence on assessment, credentials, and learning signals

A2.6 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Assessment signals are weakly aligned with actual learning.**
   Independent assessments show modest mastery by the end of primary school, particularly in mathematics, placing a hard constraint on what public examination results can credibly signal about student competence.
2. **Credentials have expanded faster than learning.**
   Public examination outcomes, including pass rates and top grades, have risen sharply over time despite persistently weak proficiency measured independently, creating a widening gap between credentials and mastery.
3. **Examination outcomes are highly sensitive to administrative discretion.**
   The sharp year-to-year swings observed in SSC and HSC results indicate that marking, moderation, and enforcement regimes exert a strong influence on outcomes, undermining result stability.
4. **Integrity failures further weaken credibility.**
   Recurrent concerns around question leakage and the repeated re-emergence of "auto pass" provisions indicate systemic vulnerabilities in examination governance rather than isolated incidents.
5. **Households respond rationally to weak signals through private risk management.**
   As assessment reliability declines, households increasingly invest in tutoring and coaching as insurance against uncertainty, treating examinations as high-stakes risk events rather than transparent measures of learning.
6. **Private coaching reinforces credentialism over mastery.**
   Coaching aligns tightly to examination formats and marking schemes, narrowing learning and further weakening the signalling value of public assessments, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.

A3 Governance failures, incentives, and resource leakages in education delivery

Evidence across national reviews, administrative data, and field-based studies indicates that governance failures materially constrain the conversion of education spending into learning. These failures are not episodic. They reflect incentive structures that tolerate leakage, weaken enforcement, and prioritise procedural compliance over instructional performance.

A3.1 Fragmented authority and weak horizontal accountability

Bangladesh's education system is governed through multiple ministries, directorates, and boards, with limited coordination at delivery level. The White Paper documents that curriculum, textbooks, assessment, teacher management, and supervision are administered through separate institutional chains, reducing coherence between what is taught, assessed, and monitored.

The Consultation Committee Report notes that local government bodies and school management committees have no formal authority over teacher discipline, transfers, or performance appraisal, limiting their ability to hold schools accountable for learning outcomes. Oversight therefore flows upward, through reporting and audits, rather than outward to parents, communities, or peer institutions, resulting in weak and uneven horizontal accountability for learning. Notably, the district and upazila levels operate primarily as transmission and reporting nodes rather than as empowered problem-solving tiers, limiting their ability to diagnose learning issues locally or adapt responses in real time.

Evidence from recent governance analysis of primary schools reinforces this diagnosis. A recent study by BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) [5] on primary school governance shows that the vertical governance structure involves multiple actors with overlapping but incomplete authority, creating fragmentation and diffusion of responsibility. Formal monitoring is dominated by reporting and procedural compliance, while verification of actual school-level conditions is limited. The study finds that where informal horizontal checks exist, such as community scrutiny or third-party verification, governance quality improves through increased visibility and reputational pressure. However, these mechanisms operate unevenly and cannot substitute for system-wide accountability arrangements.

As a result, accountability is largely procedural. Schools and local offices are incentivised to submit complete reports on time, but face limited consequences for persistent underperformance in attendance, instructional quality, or learning outcomes.

A3.2 Resource leakage at school level

The most detailed empirical evidence on leakage comes from the joint study by BIGD and SOAS University[6] on resource leakages in government primary schools. Based on intensive fieldwork in ten government primary schools, the study documents systematic inflation of enrolment figures, diversion of school grants, and informal payments linked to access to funds.

In sampled schools, reported enrolment exceeded observed regular attendance by around 10 per cent on average, with higher discrepancies in schools located near private institutions where students were formally registered but not regularly present. While the study is not nationally representative, similar concerns are recorded in consultation findings and Education Watch observations, suggesting that weak enrolment verification is not isolated.

Misuse of School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) funds is also documented. The BIGD-SOAS study records inflated procurement costs and informal deductions at multiple points in the disbursement chain. The Task Force Report corroborates these concerns by explicitly calling

[5] BIGD. (2025). Primary school governance in Bangladesh. Dhaka: BIGD.
[6] BIGD & SOAS. (2025). Resource leakages in primary schools in Bangladesh: Do horizontal checks have an effect on the quality of governance? Dhaka and London: BIGD & SOAS.

for stronger financial oversight and transparency at school level, indicating that such practices are recognised as systemic.

A3.3 Teacher effort, absenteeism, and low-powered incentives

Teacher effort represents one of the most direct channels through which governance affects learning. Education Watch unannounced school visits consistently report teacher absence rates in the range of 15 to 25 per cent, with higher absence in rural and disadvantaged locations.

The BIGD-SOAS study provides explanatory context for these patterns. It documents irregular supervision, limited sanctions, and the role of political or social connections in insulating teachers from consequences. Where promotion and career progression are largely seniority-based, the marginal return to instructional effort is low.

The White Paper confirms that teacher appraisal systems focus primarily on attendance records and qualifications, with limited linkage to classroom performance or student learning. Head teachers, according to the Consultation Committee Report, have restricted authority to discipline staff or reallocate teaching responsibilities, further weakening incentives for consistent effort.

A3.4 Supervision, discretion, and enforcement gaps

Formal supervision mechanisms exist at scale, but evidence indicates that their impact is limited. The Consultation Committee Report notes that supervisory visits often prioritise checklist compliance and data verification rather than instructional observation or corrective action. This pattern is reinforced by the ASPR for 2022 and 2023, which document persistent and recurrent gaps between planned activities and actual implementation at school and upazila levels. Despite high reported completion of administrative targets, the ASPR highlights uneven supervision coverage, limited follow-up on monitoring findings, and weak linkage between identified problems and corrective action. These findings support the conclusion that governance systems generate information but do not reliably translate it into instructional improvement.

BANBEIS and directorate systems collect extensive administrative data, yet these data are primarily used for upward reporting rather than local problem-solving. As a result, weak performance is documented but not made visible in ways that trigger action, peer scrutiny, or local correction. Where underperformance is identified, responses typically involve additional reporting requirements or centrally designed programmes rather than targeted enforcement or support.

This creates high discretion with low consequence. When learning problems remain largely invisible beyond compliance reports, rules exist, but their application is uneven, and sanctions for non-compliance are uncertain. In such an environment, effort reduction and rent-seeking become rational and stabilised responses.

A3.5 Political incentives and outcome management

Political incentives shape which education outcomes are treated as achievements and which are treated as tolerable costs. Across reform cycles, visible outputs such as enrolment

expansion, infrastructure delivery, stipend coverage, and headline examination results have carried clear political value. Learning outcomes have carried less immediate reward, particularly when they require confrontation with entrenched interests, enforcement costs, or credibility risks.

The White Paper documents the long-run rise in public examination success rates and top grades alongside persistent evidence of weak mastery measured independently. It also discusses recurrent integrity failures, including question leakage, and links these vulnerabilities to systemic weaknesses in governance. The Task Force Report's explicit calls to end "auto pass" provisions and stop question leakage further imply that credibility problems are not incidental, and that they have required repeated reassertion at senior policy levels.

Analytically, the key issue is enforcement asymmetry. Where the system is able to enforce compliance and reporting, those behaviours become reliable. Where the system is less able or less willing to enforce learning integrity and sanction malpractice consistently, those domains become discretionary. Discretion, in turn, creates both uncertainty and opportunity. It strengthens risk management by households, it expands shadow markets, and it discourages bureaucratic dissent when speaking plainly is costly and follow-through is uneven.

This pattern is consistent with an equilibrium in which outcome management becomes a rational political strategy, and administrative caution becomes a rational bureaucratic strategy, even as learning evidence deteriorates.

A3.6 Governance as an equilibrium

Across reports, a consistent picture emerges. Governance failures persist not because actors lack awareness, but because incentive structures normalise certain behaviours. Where enforcement is weak, discretion is high, and outcomes are politically sensitive, practices such as enrolment inflation, fund leakage, and reduced effort become stable equilibrium responses.

Instances of stronger performance are often associated with informal horizontal accountability, such as active community pressure or influential local actors. However, these conditions are uneven and cannot be relied upon as a system-wide solution.

A3.7 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Governance arrangements prioritise procedural compliance over learning accountability.**
   Oversight systems emphasise reporting and formal processes, while accountability for instructional quality and learning outcomes remains weak.
2. **Authority is fragmented across multiple actors with incomplete mandates.**
   Overlapping institutional responsibilities diffuse accountability and weaken vertical coherence, limiting the system's capacity to enforce standards consistently.
3. **Horizontal accountability mechanisms are weak and uneven.**
   Local government bodies, school management committees, and communities have limited formal authority, resulting in minimal peer or community pressure for learning performance.
4. **Resource allocation is distorted by weak verification.**
   Enrolment inflation and limited attendance verification lead to misallocation of funds at school level, weakening the link between resources and actual service delivery.

5. **Teacher effort is governed by low-powered incentives.**
   Absenteeism and reduced instructional effort persist where supervision is irregular, sanctions are weak, and promotion is largely seniority-based.
6. **Enforcement gaps normalise leakage and underperformance.**
   When rules exist but consequences are uncertain, effort reduction and informal extraction become rational equilibrium behaviours.
7. **Political incentives favour visible outcomes over substantive learning.**
   Emphasis on enrolment, infrastructure, and headline examination results encourages outcome management while deferring structural learning problems.

A4 Education financing, expenditure efficiency, and resource leakages

Education financing shapes what the system can deliver, but also how the system behaves. Where spending is low, rigid, and absorbed by recurrent costs, schools and local offices have limited discretionary capacity to address learning gaps. Where allocation and utilisation are weakly linked to performance, and where leakage occurs, additional spending does not reliably translate into improved instruction. The evidence across multiple reports and studies suggests that Bangladesh faces a dual constraint. Public education spending is low relative to stated ambitions, and the spending that does occur is not consistently converted into learning because incentives, discretion, and accountability are misaligned. The binding constraint is therefore not funding alone, but the way financing interacts with incentives, verification, and accountability to shape behaviour across the system.

A4.1 Low spending relative to ambition and international benchmarks

The White Paper reports that public education spending as a share of GDP has not shown a progressive trend, and notes a decline in the education budget share of GDP from **1**.9 per cent to 1.69 per cent in FY2025. The same section links this to underachievement against national targets and highlights the mismatch between ambition and fiscal commitment.

The White Paper also explicitly references international benchmarks under the Education 2030 Framework for Action, stating that it recommends countries allocate 4–6 per cent of GDP to education, and notes that Bangladesh is “way behind” that benchmark. Further it shows that that education’s share of the total budget fluctuates around the low teens, with values in the range of approximately 10.4 to 14 per cent across the period shown

A4.2 Composition and rigidity of public spending

Beyond the level of spending, the composition of spending constrains learning investment. The White Paper notes a “budget utilisation bias towards non-development expenditure” and reports that actual non-development spending has been significantly greater than development expenditure in education over the period discussed. This matters because non-development spending is typically salary and routine administration, which is necessary but leaves limited fiscal room for learning materials, teacher coaching, remediation supports, or school-level problem-solving.

The Task Force Report reinforces this diagnosis through its discussion of budget allocation and teacher incentives. It includes a figure on ministry and division-wise education sector allocation, drawing on budget briefs between 2021–24. The figure shows multiple allocation

values for the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Secondary and Higher Education Division and then links low teacher salary to motivation and private tutoring, stating that primary and secondary teacher salaries are among the lowest in South-East Asia.

This combination of low overall spending, salary-heavy composition, and limited discretion reduces the system's ability to finance learning improvement as a routine function rather than as time-bound projects.

A4.3 Expenditure efficiency and leakage in delivery chains

Even where funds exist, evidence indicates that resources do not reliably reach intended learning uses. The BIGD–SOAS study on resource leakages in primary schools, multiple leakage mechanisms in government primary schooling, including enrolment inflation and diversion of school grants are identified. In the study's sampled schools, the report documents that recorded enrolment exceeded observed regular attendance by around 10 per cent on average, indicating systematic incentives to over-report enrolment where enrolment-linked resources or benefits exist. The study also documents irregularities in the use of school-level funds, including inflated procurement and informal deductions at multiple points in the chain.

This is not only a "corruption" story. It is a fiscal efficiency story. When monitoring focuses on paperwork rather than verification, and when sanctions are uncertain, leakage becomes a rational equilibrium response for actors who face low risk of enforcement and high upside from informal extraction.

The Consultation Committee Report supports the institutional logic behind these patterns by documenting constraints on enforcement and school-level authority, including the limits on local accountability mechanisms and the strong upward compliance orientation. In this environment, increased spending without governance reform can increase the size of the pool available for leakage without increasing learning.

A4.4 Cost shifting to households and the rise of private financing

Private tutoring and coaching also reveal a deeper financing problem: the progressive transfer of the effective cost of learning and progression from the public system to households. Where public spending is low, rigid, and weakly linked to learning outcomes, families increasingly finance the conditions needed to progress through schooling.

Education Watch provides clear evidence of this shift. In 2022, households spent on average BDT 13,882 per year on primary education and BDT 27,340 on secondary education, with tutoring and coaching accounting for the largest share of expenditure in both cases. By mid-2023, household education spending had already reached levels equivalent to 62 per cent of the previous year's total for primary students and 83 per cent for secondary students, implying sharp real increases in private costs.

This pattern indicates more than supplementary spending. It reflects a de facto privatisation of progression, in which households purchase learning time, examination preparation, and academic support that the public system is unable to deliver reliably. As a result, the financial burden of securing educational outcomes is shifted away from the state and onto families.

The consequences are structural. When progression depends on household expenditure, public schooling becomes less able to function as an equalising institution. Students from wealthier households are better positioned to compensate for weak instruction, large class sizes, and limited remediation, while poorer households face higher risks of falling behind despite formal access to schooling.

This cost shifting also feeds back into system behaviour. Teachers facing low salaries and weak incentives may rationally allocate effort toward private tutoring markets. Schools adapt to parental demand for coaching-oriented instruction. Over time, these responses normalise a dual system in which public provision covers credentials in name, while households finance the conditions needed to achieve them in practice.

Seen in this light, rising private expenditure is not an anomaly but a predictable response to low public investment combined with weak accountability for learning. Without changes to how public financing is allocated, verified, and linked to outcomes, additional household spending is likely to continue substituting for, rather than complementing, public education delivery.

A4.5 Financing as a behavioural signal

Financing does not only provide inputs. It signals what is rewarded. Low public spending combined with weak verification and weak linkage to learning outcomes signals that compliance, credentials, and administrative performance matter more than learning. Household responses then become rational. Families invest in tutoring as risk management. Teachers respond to low salary and low-powered incentives by shifting effort toward private tutoring markets. Local systems adapt to weak enforcement by normalising leakage and informal payments. Over time, these behaviours become stabilised and difficult to reverse without changes to both fiscal levels and the incentive architecture through which funds are allocated, used, and verified.

A4.6 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Public education spending remains low relative to ambition.**
   Education expenditure as a share of GDP has stagnated or declined, falling well below international benchmarks referenced in national policy frameworks.
2. **Spending composition limits learning investment.**
   A persistent bias toward non-development expenditure constrains fiscal space for instructional improvement, remediation, and school-level problem-solving.
3. **Higher spending does not automatically translate into better learning.**
   Where finance is weakly linked to performance and verification is limited, additional resources are absorbed by recurrent commitments rather than improving instruction.
4. **Leakage reflects fiscal inefficiency as much as corruption.**
   Enrolment inflation, procurement irregularities, and weak oversight persist where monitoring prioritises paperwork over verification.
5. **Households increasingly finance progression through private expenditure.**
   Tutoring and coaching have become the dominant components of household education spending, effectively shifting the cost of learning from the public system to families.

6. **Cost shifting amplifies inequality.**
   Students from wealthier households can compensate for weak public provision, while poorer households face higher risks of falling behind despite formal access.
7. **Financing arrangements shape behaviour across the system.**
   Low public investment combined with weak accountability signals that credentials matter more than learning, reinforcing tutoring markets, leakage, and credentialism.

A5 Equity and inclusion

Bangladesh has achieved near-universal access to schooling at early stages, yet participation, learning, and progression remain unevenly distributed across socioeconomic groups, gender, geography, disability status, and language communities. Evidence across administrative data, household surveys, and consultation findings indicates that equity gaps are not confined to access alone. They reflect cumulative disadvantages that shape attendance, classroom experience, learning progression, and transition outcomes across the education lifecycle.

This section diagnoses the main dimensions through which inequity is produced and sustained within the education system.

A5.1 Poverty, household constraints, and uneven participation

Household income remains one of the strongest predictors of educational continuity and learning opportunity. Education Watch consistently reports that students from low-income households face higher risks of irregular attendance, repetition, and dropout, particularly beyond primary education. These risks are shaped not only by direct costs, but also by opportunity costs, household labour demands, and limited learning support at home (Education Watch, various rounds).

BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that while enrolment at primary level remains high nationally, dropout accelerates sharply at secondary level, with higher attrition among students from poorer households and marginal locations. Education Watch findings further indicate that learning outcomes differ substantially by wealth quintile, with students from poorer households significantly less likely to demonstrate grade-level literacy and numeracy by the end of primary school.

Rising household expenditure on education intensifies these inequities. As shown in A1.4, private tutoring and coaching constitute the largest share of household education spending, particularly at secondary level. Where households cannot afford supplementation, students are more likely to fall behind, reinforcing income-based learning gaps.

A5.2 Gender, adolescence, and dropout

Bangladesh has achieved and sustained gender parity in enrolment at primary level, and girls' enrolment exceeds boys' at early secondary levels. However, this parity does not translate into equitable progression through adolescence. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that secondary dropout remains higher for girls than for boys, with cumulative dropout exceeding 30 per cent by Grade 10, and girls experiencing particularly sharp attrition between Grades 8 and 10.

Education Watch and the Consultation Committee Report identify multiple drivers of female dropout during adolescence, including early marriage, safety concerns, household responsibilities, and social norms that restrict mobility. While stipend programmes have supported enrolment, they have not fully addressed these structural constraints, particularly where schooling quality is perceived as low or where examination pressure increases household risk.

The White Paper notes that girls are overrepresented among youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), particularly in the 15–24 age group, indicating that transition failures extend beyond schooling into labour market outcomes (White Paper). These patterns suggest that gendered disadvantage shifts form across the education lifecycle rather than disappearing.

A5.3 Geography, mobility, and marginal locations

Geographic location strongly conditions access to stable schooling and effective learning time. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show persistent disparities in class size, teacher availability, and infrastructure quality between urban centres and rural or hard-to-reach areas, including char, haor, and coastal regions.

Education Watch field studies report that students in urban informal settlements, char regions, and migration-prone households experience high levels of attendance irregularity. In some contexts, around one in four students is absent on a typical school day, reflecting seasonal migration, household instability, and labour demand. Urban poverty presents a distinct but comparable risk profile: despite physical proximity to schools, children in informal settlements experience overcrowded classrooms, unstable attendance, and weak instructional continuity, producing learning outcomes that are often no better than those in remote rural areas. Irregular attendance reduces cumulative instructional time and undermines progression, particularly for students with weak foundational skills.

Geographic inequities were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Education Watch surveys conducted during school closures show that access to remote learning resources was substantially lower in rural areas and urban slums than in better-resourced urban households. Post-reopening assessments indicate slower learning recovery in these locations, reinforcing pre-existing gaps.

A5.4 Disability, language, and inclusion gaps

Children with disabilities face persistent barriers to participation and learning. BANBEIS 2023 statistics data indicate that a minority of schools have accessible infrastructure such as ramps, adapted toilets, or inclusive learning materials, and teacher training in inclusive pedagogy remains limited. Education Watch reports that children with disabilities are more likely to enrol late, attend irregularly, and drop out before completing primary education.

Language is another significant axis of exclusion. In multilingual areas, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts and other indigenous regions, many children begin school in Bangla despite not speaking it at home. The White Paper notes that early instruction in a non-home language reduces comprehension, confidence, and classroom participation, particularly in early grades. These early disadvantages carry forward into later learning stages, especially in mathematics and science where language demands increase.

The Consultation Committee Report emphasises that existing inclusion policies have not been systematically operationalised at classroom level. While frameworks exist for disability inclusion and mother-tongue instruction, implementation capacity, materials, and teacher support remain uneven, limiting their impact on actual learning conditions.

A5.5 Cumulative disadvantage and system-wide implications

Across these dimensions, inequity operates cumulatively rather than independently. Poverty interacts with geography; gender norms intersect with household constraints; disability and language barriers compound early learning gaps. As a result, students who begin school at a disadvantage are more likely to experience weaker instruction, irregular attendance, and higher examination risk, and less likely to benefit from private supplementation.

The evidence reviewed suggests that equity challenges in Bangladesh's education system are not primarily about access. They are about differential exposure to effective learning conditions over time. Without targeted mechanisms to address these cumulative disadvantages, system-wide improvements in averages are unlikely to close persistent gaps.

A5.6 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Equity gaps extend beyond access to differential learning exposure.**
   Disparities are driven by differences in attendance stability, instructional quality, and cumulative learning time rather than enrolment alone.
2. **Poverty shapes both participation and learning outcomes.**
   Low-income households face higher dropout risk and are less able to compensate for weak classroom instruction through private supplementation.
3. **Gender parity in enrolment masks sharp adolescent dropout.**
   Girls experience disproportionate attrition during lower and upper secondary education, with disadvantages re-emerging during key transition points.
4. **Geography strongly conditions learning opportunity.**
   Students in rural, hard-to-reach, and informal urban settlements experience larger classes, weaker staffing, and more irregular attendance.
5. **Mobility and instability disrupt instructional continuity.**
   Migration-prone households and informal settlements face chronic disruptions that reduce cumulative learning time.
6. **Disability and language barriers remain weakly addressed in practice.**
   Limited accessible infrastructure, uneven teacher preparation, and non-home language instruction constrain participation and comprehension.
7. **Disadvantage accumulates across the education lifecycle.**
   Early gaps compound over time, making later remediation increasingly difficult and reinforcing intergenerational inequality.

A6 Education streams and stratification

Bangladesh's education system is organised across multiple parallel streams, including general education, madrasah education, English-medium institutions, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). While this diversity has expanded access and responded to varied social preferences, evidence indicates that the streams function as stratified pathways

rather than equivalent routes, producing systematically different learning conditions, credentials, and transition opportunities.

This section diagnoses how stream differentiation contributes to unequal preparation for examinations, further education, and employment.

A6.1 Size and distribution of education streams

BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that the general education stream enrols the majority of students, while madrasah education accounts for a substantial minority, particularly in rural areas. English-medium institutions enrol a relatively small share of students but are concentrated in urban centres and serve households with greater economic and social capital. TVET enrolment remains modest relative to general secondary education despite longstanding policy emphasis on skills development.

The White Paper notes that while multiple streams operate under national policy frameworks, coordination across streams is limited, and planning often occurs in parallel rather than through integrated mechanisms. This fragmentation affects curriculum alignment, assessment comparability, and student mobility between streams.

Planning, regulation, curriculum development, assessment, and certification across streams are overseen by separate authorities and boards, with limited coordination or shared accountability mechanisms. As a result, stream-level decisions are made largely in parallel rather than within a unified system logic, weakening vertical coherence and reducing the state's ability to ensure equivalent learning expectations or pathways across streams.

A6.2 Differences in learning conditions and instructional quality

Evidence from Education Watch and national reviews indicates that learning conditions vary substantially across streams. Students in English-medium schools typically experience smaller class sizes, longer instructional time, and greater access to supplementary learning resources, including private tutoring. These conditions are associated with higher average proficiency, though outcomes within this stream are highly unequal and concentrated in a subset of elite institutions.

In contrast, many general education and madrasah schools operate with larger class sizes and more constrained instructional environments, particularly in rural and disadvantaged locations. BANBEIS 2023 statistics show that shortages of subject-qualified teachers in mathematics, science, and English are more prevalent in general and madrasah institutions outside major urban centres. Education Watch classroom observations indicate that rote-based instruction is common across these streams, with limited remediation or enrichment opportunities.

Madrasah education plays a crucial access role for many communities, yet curriculum balance differs. The White Paper and Task Force Report note that in many madrasahs, instructional time devoted to religious studies reduces exposure to science, mathematics, and English, particularly where staffing is limited. This affects preparedness for higher secondary science streams and tertiary education.

A6.3 Assessment alignment and credential differentiation

Assessment arrangements further reinforce stratification. While public examinations nominally apply across streams, preparation pathways differ. Students in English-medium schools often follow international curricula and sit separate examinations, while students in general and madrasah streams rely on national boards.

As shown in A1.2, public examination outcomes in general education have expanded over time, but learning mastery remains uneven. The Consultation Committee Report notes that credential comparability across streams is limited, and that employers and tertiary institutions often treat qualifications from different streams differently, regardless of formal equivalence

These dynamics weaken the signalling value of credentials and increase reliance on informal screening, coaching, or institutional reputation, which advantages students from better-resourced streams.

A6.4 TVET pathways and constrained upward mobility

TVET programmes are intended to provide applied skills and faster entry into employment, yet enrolment remains low relative to general secondary education. BANBEIS 2023 statistics indicate that TVET accounts for a small share of secondary-level enrolment, and participation is uneven across regions.

The Task Force Report notes that while some TVET graduates transition successfully into work, pathways from TVET into higher education or higher-productivity employment are not consistently articulated, limiting upward mobility. Where TVET is perceived as a terminal track rather than a flexible pathway, it attracts fewer high-performing students, reinforcing its lower status.

A6.5 Private supplementation and stream reinforcement

Household behaviour further entrenches stream stratification. Education Watch data show that access to private tutoring and coaching is substantially higher among students in general and English-medium schools than among madrasah or TVET students. As tutoring increasingly functions as a parallel system for learning and examination preparation, streams with greater access to private supplementation gain further advantage.

This dynamic shifts stratification from formal policy design to household capacity to pay. Over time, it amplifies inequalities in learning, examination performance, and transitions, even when formal access is nominally open.

A6.6 Limited horizontal and vertical mobility

Evidence across reports suggests that mobility between streams is limited. Transitions from madrasah to general education or from TVET to higher secondary or tertiary education are possible in principle, but face curricular mismatches, assessment barriers, and institutional gatekeeping (White Paper; Consultation Committee Report).

As a result, early stream placement has long-term consequences. Students who enter less-resourced streams with weaker learning conditions face increasing difficulty moving into higher-status pathways later, even when motivation and ability are present.

A6.7 Summary of key diagnostic findings

1. **Education streams function as stratified pathways rather than equivalent routes.** Parallel systems produce systematically different learning conditions, credentials, and transition opportunities.
2. **Stream governance is fragmented and weakly coordinated.** Separate authorities oversee curriculum, assessment, and certification, reducing vertical coherence and comparability across pathways.
3. **Learning conditions differ sharply by stream.** English-medium institutions offer smaller classes and greater supplementation, while general and madrasah streams face more constrained environments.
4. **TVET remains marginal and weakly linked to upward mobility.** Limited scale and unclear pathways into higher education or skilled employment reinforce its lower status.
5. **Assessment and credential signalling vary across streams.** Formal equivalence masks informal differentiation by employers and tertiary institutions.
6. **Private tutoring reinforces stream advantages.** Household ability to pay increasingly determines learning and examination outcomes, intensifying stratification.
7. **Mobility between streams is limited.** Early placement has long-term consequences, with institutional and curricular barriers constraining later movement.

A7 Conclusion: Why learning has not followed schooling

Appendix A set out to explain a central paradox in Bangladesh's education system: sustained expansion in access and credentials has not translated into consistent gains in learning. The evidence reviewed across learning assessments, assessment behaviour, governance arrangements, financing patterns, and household responses shows that this disconnect is not the result of isolated implementation failures. It reflects a stable equilibrium in which incentives, institutions, and behaviours interact in ways that reproduce weak learning outcomes over time.

At the centre of this equilibrium is misalignment between what the system measures, what it rewards, and what it can credibly enforce. Students progress through grades without secure mastery because curriculum pacing, assessment signals, and classroom realities are weakly aligned. Public examinations, rather than functioning as reliable measures of competence, have become vulnerable to integrity failures and administrative discretion, encouraging credential-seeking behaviour by schools and risk management by households. Governance systems prioritise procedural compliance and upward reporting, while accountability for instructional quality and learning remains diffuse. Financing is low, rigid, and weakly linked to verified learning improvement, which accelerates cost shifting to families and amplifies inequality. Parallel education streams further stratify opportunity, with limited mobility once pathways diverge.

These dynamics reinforce one another. Weak assessment credibility expands private tutoring markets. Private tutoring reshapes teaching practice and parental expectations. Weak governance and low-powered incentives make effort reduction and leakage rational for some actors, while fear of speaking plainly becomes rational for others. Over time, the system's most reliable consequences attach to controllable outputs, not learning integrity. In such a system, underperformance is not aberrant. It is predictable.

This predictability reflects not only institutional inertia but repeated choices about what is politically valuable, what is administratively feasible, and what is allowed to persist. The diagnosis therefore identifies binding constraints that recur across subsystems: weak learning signals, fragmented authority, enforcement asymmetry, low-powered incentives, limited protected instructional time, cost shifting to households, and stratified pathways with limited mobility. Addressing any one of these in isolation is unlikely to shift outcomes.

Appendix A provides the empirical and analytical foundation for the Vision and the National Learning Implementation Framework. It clarifies not only what is not working, but why, and therefore where reform effort must concentrate to move the system from schooling expansion to sustained learning improvement.

Appendix B: The Feedback Architecture of Bangladesh's Education System

B1. Purpose and scope

This appendix sets out the feedback architecture that explains why Bangladesh's education system behaves as it does, why weak learning outcomes persist despite repeated reform efforts, and where leverage for change lies. It is designed to be readable as a standalone chapter. A reader should be able to start here and understand the system logic without needing to have read Chapters 1 – 4, while still seeing clearly how this appendix underpins the system diagnosis in Chapter 3 and the learning journey in Chapter 4.

Education systems do not behave randomly. They produce recognisable patterns over time because they are organised through structures, incentives, information flows, and relationships that generate particular forms of behaviour. These patterns are sustained through feedback processes that link actions in one part of the system to responses in another, often with delays that obscure cause and effect (Meadows, 2008; Sterman, 2000). Understanding these feedback processes is essential for explaining why some reforms gain traction while others fade, and why effort alone is insufficient to change outcomes.

A feedback loop describes how a change reinforces or moderates itself over time. Reinforcing feedback strengthens a direction of change, allowing learning gains to accumulate or deterioration to compound. Balancing feedback stabilises behaviour by dampening change, sometimes productively and sometimes in ways that protect ineffective routines. Systems behave as they do not because of stated intentions, but because of the feedback structures that govern how information, incentives, and risk circulate through the system (Meadows, 2008).

This appendix maps approximately thirty recurring loops that, taken together, constitute a practical model of Bangladesh's education system behaviour. These loops are not exhaustive, nor are they unique to Bangladesh. They are structural patterns that recur across evidence and explain observed outcomes. The aim is not to claim that every school is the same, but to explain why familiar system-wide patterns reappear even when local effort is high.

B2. Analytical lenses and an anchoring example

This appendix analyses Bangladesh's education system using three complementary analytical lenses: systems thinking, behavioural realism, and adaptive governance. These lenses clarify how the system is being interpreted before the feedback architecture is presented. Without this framing, complex system behaviour is often misread as technical abstraction, or as a critique of individual actors. The argument here is different: outcomes persist because the system is structured in ways that generate predictable patterns of behaviour over time (Meadows, 2008; Sterman, 2000).

Lens 1: Systems thinking – outcomes emerge from feedback structure
Lens 2: Behavioural realism – actors adapt rationally to incentives and risk
Lens 3: Adaptive governance – reform succeeds when the system can learn and adjust safely

B2.1 Lens 1: Systems thinking

Systems thinking treats education not as a linear delivery chain, but as a complex system composed of interacting parts. Cause and effect are often separated in time and space.

Decisions taken in curriculum design, assessment rules, or administrative accountability can shape classroom behaviour years later, in ways that are not immediately visible to decision-makers (Sterman, 2000). Large investments can coexist with weak learning if the underlying feedback structure remains unchanged. Conversely, relatively small structural shifts can generate disproportionate effects when they alter how feedback and incentives work (Meadows, 2008).

B2.2 Lens 2: Behavioural realism

Behavioural realism begins from a simple premise. Teachers, officials, students, and families generally behave in ways that are sensible given the incentives, risks, and signals they face. Behaviour adapts to consequences, not to intentions (Simon, 1957; March and Olsen, 1989). In high-stakes, low-trust environments, risk avoidance becomes rational. When rewards for improving learning are uncertain and costs of deviation are high, actors prioritise behaviours that are safer, more visible, or more predictable. Reforms that assume actors will behave differently without changing the conditions they face tend to be absorbed (Pritchett, 2015).

B2.3 Lens 3: Adaptive governance

Adaptive governance recognises that education systems operate under uncertainty, fragmentation, and political constraint. Authority is distributed, information is imperfect, and control is partial. Reform therefore cannot succeed through blueprint design alone (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017). Systems improve when they can learn from their own experience. That requires feedback that is timely, credible, and safe to act on. It also requires sequencing, because some conditions must be stabilised before others can be strengthened. In contexts like Bangladesh, reforms that raise stakes without first strengthening credibility and trust often trigger defensive behaviour rather than improvement (Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky, 2009; OECD, 2017).

B2.4 Anchoring example: why learning does not automatically follow schooling

Over the past two decades, schooling in Bangladesh expanded rapidly. Classrooms were built, enrolment increased, and examination participation rose. From a linear perspective, learning should have improved as a result.

A systems view explains why that did not follow automatically. Expansion changed some visible parts of the system while leaving key behavioural drivers largely intact. The incentive logic inside classrooms remained anchored in examination pressure. Administrative accountability remained anchored in compliance and reporting. Feedback from learning evidence to day-to-day practice remained weak.

A behavioural view explains why sensible people reinforced the pattern. Teachers narrowed instruction toward exam-relevant coverage because deviation carried professional and social risk. Officials prioritised reporting and procedural compliance because these behaviours were monitored and carried lower personal risk. Families invested in private tutoring to manage uncertainty, especially where classroom learning did not reliably translate into predictable results.

An adaptive governance view explains why evidence did not trigger correction. Data travelled upward, but actionable feedback rarely returned to classrooms in time to matter. Reform

initiatives were often added as new activities rather than used to reshape the feedback relationships stabilising low learning.

The result was a stable pattern: expanding access alongside weak learning. No single actor caused this outcome. It emerged from the interaction between structure, incentive-shaped behaviour, and limited capacity for system-level learning and correction. This mirrors global experience in many systems where schooling expanded faster than learning (World Bank, 2018).

B3. The feedback architecture in four layers

The remainder of this appendix sets out the feedback architecture as four nested layers. These layers connect lived learning experience to deeper system dynamics and clarify where leverage for change lies. The layers are mutually reinforcing. They should not be read as a hierarchy of importance, but as a map of where behaviour is produced and stabilised.

Layer 1 explains the learning dynamics that determine whether learning accumulates or collapses in everyday experience. Layer 2 explains the domains that produce and constrain those dynamics. Layer 3 sets out the feedback loops that stabilise behaviour within and across domains, using Table B-1 as the organising map. Layer 4 identifies leverage points where structural shifts can change which loops dominate.

B4. Layer 1: Learning dynamics that determine whether learning accumulates

Chapter 3 identifies five learning dynamics that recur as decisive in Bangladesh's system diagnosis, and Chapter 4 makes them concrete through lived experience: readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and alignment. In this appendix they serve a specific purpose. They are the "surface conditions" that the deeper loops are producing.

These dynamics are not programmes or policies. They are conditions. When they are present, learning becomes possible and cumulative. When they are weak, learning fragments regardless of effort.

Readiness refers to whether learners can participate meaningfully in instruction from the first day they arrive. It includes early childhood development, health and nutrition, home language familiarity, emotional security, and basic exposure to print and talk. Readiness is not a one-time threshold. It is a continuing condition that can improve or deteriorate with attendance, classroom experience, and home stress. Weak readiness makes instruction feel like noise, which quickly weakens motivation and attendance.

Motivation refers to whether effort feels worthwhile. Motivation is shaped by early success, peer belonging, perceived fairness, and whether learning appears to lead somewhere. When motivation weakens, learners do not simply "try less". They ration effort, disengage, and shift toward whatever activity feels safest for progression. In high-stakes settings, this often means a narrow focus on exam-relevant tasks and coaching, even when those tasks do not build durable competence.

Feedback refers to whether learners and teachers can adjust in time. Feedback must be frequent enough to be actionable, clear enough to interpret, and safe enough to respond to. When feedback is delayed, ambiguous, or punitive, it does not guide improvement. It trains

avoidance. Teachers teach to what is tested. Learners guess what matters. Families hedge through tutoring.

Trust refers to whether actors feel safe to act on learning evidence. Teachers must trust that slowing down for mastery will not be punished through supervision or exam results. Families must trust that assessment signals are credible and that classroom learning can carry their child forward. Officials must trust that reporting problems will not carry disproportionate risk. In low-trust environments, people protect themselves through compliance and private solutions.

Alignment refers to whether the system's signals reinforce one another. Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, supervision, and pathways must point in the same direction. When signals conflict, effort moves to the safest substitute. If curriculum says "competency" but exams reward memorisation, the exam signal wins. If policy says "foundations" but time is consumed by coverage pressure, foundations lose.

Layer 1 matters because it clarifies what "improvement" looks like in lived terms. System change is not a collection of initiatives. It is a sustained shift in these five conditions.

B5. Layer 2: System domains that produce and constrain learning dynamics

The five learning dynamics do not arise in isolation. They are produced and constrained by five interacting domains. These domains are analytical rather than hierarchical. They help organise complexity without implying that any single institution controls outcomes.

B5.1 Learning and classroom dynamics

This domain covers what happens inside classrooms and schools: teacher motivation, instructional practice, classroom routines, time on task, peer dynamics, and professional culture. It is the site where learning is either built or lost day by day. Importantly, this domain is highly sensitive to signals from outside the classroom. In Bangladesh, classroom behaviour is strongly shaped by the examination and accountability environment. That is why classroom-focused reforms can appear sound but fail to spread.

In Table B-1, the key reinforcing loops in this domain include teacher motivation (R1, R14), curriculum–pedagogy–assessment coherence (R2), time on task and learner mastery (R15, R14b), peer belonging (R16), and teacher network learning (R11). The dominant balancing pressure is high-stakes examination pressure (B1). The central issue is dominance. When B1 dominates, it suppresses or redirects the reinforcing loops that would otherwise build mastery.

B5.2 Access, equity, and human capital

This domain covers the conditions that shape who can access learning, under what constraints, and with what level of readiness. It includes poverty, health and nutrition, gender norms, geography, household stress, home language, and early childhood experience. These factors shape readiness and attendance long before classroom instruction can compensate. This is why "equal provision" can still produce unequal learning.

In Table B-1, the compounding disadvantage loops are explicit: poverty–learning gaps (R5), health and nutrition shaping attendance and attention (R17), early childhood readiness (R18), language of instruction misalignment (B10), and the attendance–engagement cycle (R19).

These loops explain why gaps emerge early and widen over time, even when schools are present.

B5.3 Governance, data, and delivery systems

This domain covers how the system is managed at scale: authority, budgets, deployment, supervision, reporting, and accountability. It determines what behaviours are rewarded and what risks are punished. It also determines whether the system can learn from its own experience. This is where many reforms fail, not because they are technically wrong, but because they collide with compliance incentives and risk aversion.

In Table B-1, the paired loops (R4/B2 and R7/B6) are central. When policy, budget, and accountability align, implementation strengthens and improvement can become reinforcing (R4). When misalignment and delays dominate, behaviour shifts toward compliance and process (B2). The same is true for data. Timely, trusted data can support adaptation (R7). Delayed or reporting-focused data strengthens inertia (B6). Bureaucratic risk aversion (B3), transparency and trust erosion (B7), and patronage and political capture (B8) are not side issues in this architecture. They are stabilisers that shape what is safe to do.

B5.4 Markets, assessment, and technology

This domain covers examinations, private tutoring, digital tools, and external benchmarking signals. These are not external to the system. They are part of its behavioural logic. Market responses often reflect rational household strategies under uncertainty. Technology can strengthen learning only when it supports classroom practice and feedback. Otherwise it becomes another layer of unequal access and implementation noise.

In Table B-1, coaching industry expansion (R3) is a predictable response to high-stakes exams (B1). Digital adoption (R10) can become reinforcing when it supports pedagogy and feedback, but the digital divide (B11) can amplify inequity when access and teacher support are uneven. Benchmarking attention (R13/B9) often spikes and fades unless it is connected to domestic feedback loops and institutional follow-through.

B5.5 Labour markets and pathways

This domain covers the relationship between schooling, skills, employment, migration, and mobility. It shapes whether learning appears meaningful beyond exams. When the labour market rewards certificates more than competence, families and learners rationally prioritise progression signals over mastery. When technical and vocational pathways deliver visible returns, legitimacy and demand can become self-reinforcing.

In Table B-1, credentialism (R21) captures the skill–signal tension. Pathway legitimacy (R22) captures how visible labour market success can strengthen demand and employer engagement. The long-cycle development loop (R12) links skills to productivity and fiscal space, but it only becomes politically salient when nearer-term loops align.

Layer 2 matters because it prevents a common error: treating learning dynamics as classroom problems only. The dynamics are produced across domains and constrained by cross-domain signals.

B6. Layer 3: Feedback loops that stabilise system behaviour

Layer 3 is the core technical layer of this appendix. It explains why the system returns to familiar outcomes even after reform efforts. Table B-1 is not an appendix to the analysis. It is the map of the analysis. The narrative below reads the table as an interacting system, showing how loop dominance produces stable outcomes.

Table B1: Loop/Feedback Mapping of Bangladesh Education System

Domain	Definition / System Focus	Included Loops (summary)	Loop Definition
A. Learning and Classroom	Micro-level teaching–learning processes that shape what happens inside classrooms — teacher behaviour, student engagement, and pedagogical alignment.	R1 Teacher Motivation (Extrinsic–Status)	Higher pay and professional respect raise morale and teaching quality, reinforcing public trust and advocacy for education.
		R14 Teacher Motivation (Intrinsic–Purpose/Autonomy)	Teachers who experience purpose and autonomy innovate more and sustain engagement over time.
		R2 Curriculum–Pedagogy–Assessment Coherence	When curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are aligned, teachers teach what matters and feedback drives improvement.
		R15 Classroom Time-on-Task	More engaged classroom time strengthens fluency and confidence, reducing off-task behaviour.
		R14b Learner Motivation and Mastery	Early success and enjoyment build confidence, sustaining literacy and numeracy progress.
		R16 Peer Learning and Belonging	Positive peer interactions encourage participation, collaboration, and belonging.
		B1 High-Stakes Exam Pressure	Excessive exam pressure fosters rote learning and anxiety, crowding out creativity.
		R11 Teacher Network Learning (PLC or Lesson Study)	Professional learning communities share good practice and normalise reflection.
B. Access, Equity, and Human Capital	Socioeconomic, gender, and spatial factors determining who can learn and under what conditions — including health, nutrition, and family context.	R5 Poverty–Learning Gap	Poverty limits readiness and achievement, perpetuating intergenerational disadvantage.
		B5 Gender Norms and Maternal Literacy	Gendered expectations and low maternal literacy reduce home learning support.
		R6 Urban–Rural Quality Divergence	Urban areas attract better teachers and resources, widening rural quality gaps.
		R17 Health–Nutrition–Attendance	Good health and nutrition improve attendance, focus, and learning outcomes.
		R18 Early Childhood (ECCE) Readiness	Quality early-childhood education builds readiness and long-term momentum.
		B10 Language of Instruction Misalignment	When schooling begins in a non-home language, comprehension and confidence decline.
		R19 Attendance–Engagement Cycle	Regular attendance builds success and learner identity, reinforcing continued participation.
C. Governance, Data, and Delivery Systems	The organisational architecture and information flows that determine how effectively the system learns and adapts.	R4 / B2 Policy–Budget–Performance	Effective policy–budget alignment creates a reinforcing cycle of clarity, resources and performance. When alignment weakens or delays accumulate, the balancing loop becomes dominant and resources are absorbed by compliance rather than learning.
		R7 / B6 Data–Decision–Adaptation	Timely, trusted data forms a reinforcing loop that supports adaptation and problem solving. When data is delayed, fragmented or used mainly for reporting, the balancing loop becomes dominant and institutional inertia strengthens.
		B3 Bureaucratic Inertia or Risk Aversion	Fear of error discourages experimentation and slows reform.
		R9 Pilot–Learning–Scale	Evaluated pilots that inform policy enable adaptive scaling and sustained learning.
		B7 Corruption–Trust Erosion	Lack of transparency erodes efficiency and weakens accountability.
		B8 Political Capture or Patronage	Patronage distorts staffing and resource allocation, reducing effectiveness.
		R8 Public Trust–Political Will	Visible reform success builds citizen trust and political momentum for change.

		R20 Headteacher Leadership Climate	Supportive school leaders create positive cultures and stronger teacher performance.
D. Market, Assessment and Technology	External mechanisms — exams, private tutoring, and technology — that shape incentives and learning experiences.	R3 Coaching Industry Expansion	Exam pressure fuels private coaching demand, diverting energy from classroom teaching.
		R13 / B9 Global Benchmark Attention	International rankings attract reform focus but fade without institutional follow-through.
		R10 Digital Adoption and Use	Access to digital tools enhances engagement and innovation.
		B11 Digital Divide Amplifier	Unequal digital access widens learning gaps and directs investment toward advantaged schools.
E. Labour Market and Pathways	Post-school transitions linking education to employability, productivity, and the legitimacy of different pathways.	R12 Demography–Skills–Productivity	A skilled workforce drives growth, enabling further investment in education.
		R21 Signalling vs Skills (Credentialism)	Overreliance on certificates over competence weakens motivation for genuine learning.
		R22 TVET or Pathway Legitimacy	Successful technical graduates elevate the status of vocational tracks, reinforcing demand and employer engagement.

Note: Reading the Map

Reinforcing loops (R) generate momentum — they are the virtuous cycles that accelerate improvement once set in motion.
Balancing loops (B) stabilise the system — sometimes useful, but when too rigid, they can block innovation.

A simple way to interpret Table B1 is to ask two questions.

First, which loops generate learning momentum when conditions allow. Second, which loops stabilise the system around low learning by rewarding safer substitutes such as memorisation, compliance, and private tutoring.

B6.1 The core stabiliser: high-stakes examination pressure (B1) and its downstream effects

Table B1 identifies B1 as a central balancing loop. It stabilises classroom behaviour around memorisation and narrow exam preparation. This loop is powerful because it is reinforced by rational responses elsewhere in the system.

When B1 dominates, it does not merely change teaching style. It changes what is considered safe professional practice. Teachers focus on coverage and predictability. Learners focus on tasks that are rewarded. Families invest in tutoring to reduce risk. These responses then reshape the system's centre of gravity away from classroom learning and toward private solutions.

This is where Table B1 shows an important cross-domain link. B1 in the classroom domain interacts directly with R3 in the market domain. Exam pressure fuels coaching demand. Coaching demand normalises exam-centred learning. That normalisation increases pressure on teachers and learners to keep pace. The system stabilises around a high-cost equilibrium where households carry more of the burden and classroom learning becomes less trusted.

This interaction helps explain why pedagogical reforms can appear well-designed but fade. If B1 remains dominant, the system reabsorbs new pedagogy into old incentive structures.

B6.2 Why coherence is a leverage channel: R2 as the loop that makes other loops usable

R2 in Table B1 is not a generic "nice to have". It is a coherence channel that determines whether feedback can be interpreted and acted on. When curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment point in the same direction, teachers can make sensible trade-offs, feedback becomes meaningful, and learner effort has a clearer pathway to success.

When R2 is weak, teachers face contradictory signals. Policy says one thing. Exams reward another. Supervision monitors a third. Under behavioural realism, teachers respond by following the safest signal, which is typically the exam. This is one mechanism through which B1 neutralises reform intent.

This matters because R2 is the bridge between Layer 1 and Layer 3. Alignment, one of the five learning dynamics, is not achieved by messaging. It is achieved when R2 is strengthened and B1 is moderated so that signals stop fighting.

B6.3 Teacher motivation and professional culture: R1, R14, and why they do not self-activate

Table B1 distinguishes two routes into teacher motivation: extrinsic status and recognition (R1) and intrinsic purpose and autonomy (R14). Both can strengthen instructional quality and persistence. However, in environments dominated by examination pressure and compliance

monitoring, intrinsic motivation is difficult to sustain. Autonomy becomes risky. Innovation can be punished. Teachers rationally narrow practice.

That is why professional learning networks (R11) matter. They provide a social infrastructure for improvement that reduces individual risk. They also create a local feedback loop where practice can evolve through peer observation and shared routines, even when system-wide feedback remains weak.

This is also where governance loops interact with classroom loops. If bureaucratic risk aversion (B3) is strong and supervision focuses on compliance, teachers experience reform as surveillance rather than professional growth. In that configuration, R14 weakens and R11 struggles to spread beyond pockets of practice.

B6.4 Early advantage and compounding gaps: R18, R17, B10, and R19

Table B1 makes explicit that readiness is produced through interacting loops in the access and human capital domain. Early childhood experience (R18) and health and nutrition (R17) strengthen attention, stamina, and attendance. Language of instruction misalignment (B10) can stabilise low comprehension from the beginning. Attendance–engagement (R19) then becomes a compounding loop. When learners experience success, attendance reinforces learning identity. When learners experience confusion and repeated failure, absence becomes rational and disengagement becomes self-reinforcing.

This explains why later interventions often arrive too late. Without readiness, motivation collapses. Without motivation, feedback is not acted on. A system can therefore "provide schooling" while still failing to produce learning, because the early loops that generate learning traction never became dominant.

B6.5 Governance and data: the paired loops that determine whether the system can learn (R4/B2 and R7/B6)

Table B1 includes two paired loop structures that are central to adaptive governance.

R4/B2 describes the policy–budget–performance channel. When priorities, budgets, and accountability are aligned, implementation strengthens and performance can become reinforcing (R4). When alignment weakens or delays accumulate, a balancing loop dominates (B2) where behaviour shifts toward compliance, reporting, and process absorption.

R7/B6 describes the data–decision–adaptation channel. When data is timely, trusted, and used locally, it supports problem solving and adaptation (R7). When data is delayed, fragmented, or used mainly for upward reporting, inertia strengthens (B6). Information accumulates without consequence.

These paired loops explain a common Bangladesh reality: the system can "know" learning is weak without being able to correct it. Evidence exists, but the feedback return path is broken. Schools do not receive actionable diagnosis. Officials do not receive safe signals that encourage experimentation. Instead, the system defends itself through process.

This is why Layer 3 has to be central. Weak learning persists not only because of classroom issues, but because governance and data loops prevent correction.

B6.6 Trust erosion and control escalation: B7 and its interaction with B3 and B2

Table B-1 includes corruption–trust erosion (B7) and political capture or patronage (B8). These are often treated as political context, but in a feedback architecture they behave as stabilisers. When trust is low, systems typically respond by increasing control, supervision, and compliance routines. That strengthens B2 and B3. Those loops then reduce experimentation and honest reporting, which further reduces trust. The system becomes trapped in a low-learning, high-control equilibrium.

This is also why reforms that add monitoring without strengthening credibility can backfire. They increase fear and box-ticking, not learning.

B7. Layer 4: Leverage points and why sequencing matters

Layer 4 translates the feedback architecture into practical leverage points. Leverage points are places where a small structural shift changes which loops dominate, altering system behaviour without requiring constant enforcement (Meadows, 2008). In Bangladesh, the most effective leverage points tend to sit at the level of information flow, signal credibility, risk distribution, and trust.

The point is not to propose a reform menu here. The point is to clarify why certain kinds of moves create lasting change, while others are absorbed.

B7.1 Information flows that return to the point of action

The system already generates information. The problem is return. When feedback reaches classrooms and local offices in time to guide action, loops like R7 can become dominant. When feedback remains upward and delayed, B6 dominates and the system "knows" without adjusting.

A practical leverage move is therefore not more data, but different data flow: shorter cycle, more local, more interpretable, and connected to routines that allow action without blame. This directly strengthens the conditions for feedback and trust in Layer 1.

B7.2 Credibility of signals, especially assessment and pathways

Signal credibility is the structural precondition for reducing risk management behaviour. If assessment signals reward memorisation, B1 dominates regardless of curriculum intent. If certificates matter more than competence, R21 dominates regardless of pedagogy. Credibility reform changes the reward landscape that actors respond to.

This is also why moderation of exam pressure is not a soft issue. It is a loop dominance issue. If B1 remains dominant, R2, R11, and learner mastery loops cannot spread.

B7.3 Risk distribution and the safety of professional judgement

In compliance-heavy environments, B3 dominates because the personal cost of deviation is high. A leverage point is therefore the distribution of risk: making it safer for teachers and officials to surface problems, slow down, and adjust. This is not achieved through exhortation.

It is achieved through predictable protection, credible consequences, and routines that treat diagnosis as normal rather than as failure.

This leverage point is where behavioural realism meets adaptive governance. If acting on learning evidence is safer than avoiding it, behaviour shifts.

B7.4 Trust as a system condition, not a slogan

Trust is produced by repeated follow-through. Families trust when classroom learning and assessment signals align. Teachers trust when professional judgement is supported rather than punished. Officials trust when honest reporting does not create disproportionate political or bureaucratic risk.

In the architecture, trust is not an aspiration. It is the condition that determines whether the system can learn. When trust is weak, control escalates, B2 and B3 strengthen, and learning loops weaken.

B7.5 Why sequencing matters in this architecture

Sequencing is not about preference. It is about loop interactions.

If stakes rise before credibility improves, defensive behaviour increases and B1 and B3 strengthen.
If autonomy rises before coherence improves, confusion increases and R2 weakens.
If data rises without safe routines, reporting expands and B6 strengthens.
If pilots expand without absorption, R9 becomes noise rather than learning.

This is why early reform phases must concentrate on changing feedback returns, credibility, and routine coherence, not on adding initiatives. Once balancing loops that stabilise low learning weaken, reinforcing loops that support readiness, motivation, feedback, trust, and alignment can become dominant.

B8. Conclusion: what this architecture clarifies

This appendix has argued that weak learning persists not because effort is absent, but because the system is structured in ways that stabilise low-learning outcomes. Table B-1 makes that structure visible. It shows that the system contains both learning-strengthening loops and learning-limiting loops, and that outcomes depend on which loops dominate under current conditions.

The core stabilisers are clear in the table. Examination pressure (B1), compliance-oriented governance and risk aversion (B2, B3), and weak feedback return from data to practice (B6) together create an environment where rational actors protect themselves through coverage, reporting, and private solutions. In that environment, reinforcing loops that could build mastery and professional culture (R2, R11, R14b, R15) activate only locally or temporarily.

The practical implication is equally clear. Sustainable improvement requires shifting loop dominance by strengthening information returns, credibility of signals, safe problem-solving routines, and trust. These are not the most visible reform sites, but they are the most

consequential. They determine whether the system can learn from its own experience and whether improvements can spread rather than remain isolated.

Chapter 3 uses this architecture to diagnose why the system returns to familiar outcomes. Chapter 4 shows how these dynamics are experienced by learners, teachers, and families. The chapters that follow use the same architecture to justify sequencing, because some stabilising loops must weaken before learning-strengthening loops can take hold.

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Review Committee established to formulate a Vision for the Transformation of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education System

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Note to the Reader

This volume presents the National Learning Implementation Framework (NLIF)**.** It has been prepared by the Review Committee constituted by the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, as a companion to *Volume I: Vision for Learning Transformation*.

Volume II operationalises the vision, principles, and system priorities set out in Volume I by defining a governing framework for how learning improvement is pursued, sequenced, monitored, and sustained over time. Rather than prescribing programmes or interventions, the NLIF establishes the rules, routines, and decision disciplines through which reform is authorised, adapted, paused, or exited, with the aim of protecting learning integrity, equity, and system coherence.

The NLIF is designed to function as a governing instrument, not a sector plan. It does not allocate budgets, specify delivery modalities, or bind future governments to particular initiatives. Instead, it provides a durable architecture for decision-making that can be applied across different political cycles, sector plans, and investment strategies. Its purpose is to ensure that reforms, regardless of their origin, are sequenced appropriately, aligned with minimum learning expectations, and subject to credible monitoring, response, and adaptation.

This volume adopts an integrated whole-of-schooling perspective. While the Committee's formal mandate relates to secondary and higher secondary education, the NLIF recognises that learning outcomes at these levels depend on conditions established earlier in the schooling cycle and on system-wide governance choices that cut across institutional boundaries.

Volume II is intended primarily for policymakers, senior and mid-level officials, regulators, and institutions responsible for policy approval, implementation, monitoring, financing, and system oversight. It may also be used by development partners and stakeholders seeking to align support with nationally defined learning priorities and governance rules.

The NLIF sets out minimum expectations, response obligations, and escalation pathways. It is deliberately restrained in scope and is designed to evolve through disciplined adaptation rather than expansion. Decisions regarding adoption, adaptation, and application of the Framework rest with the appropriate authorities of the Government of Bangladesh, in accordance with statutory and executive processes.

Executive Summary

1. The role of the NLIF within the reform package

The National Learning Implementation Framework is proposed as the governing component of the education reform package. It is intended to sit alongside the Vision document and to give that Vision operational force over time.

The Vision establishes the national direction, priorities, and end goals for the education system. The NLIF is not intended to restate those ambitions. Its proposed function is different and narrower: to govern how decisions are taken, sequenced, corrected, and stopped as the system moves toward the Vision.

Specifically, the NLIF is designed to govern:
- how reforms are sequenced so that foundations are secured before expansion;
- how minimum conditions are enforced before expectations escalate;
- how evidence is converted into obligation rather than explanation;
- how authority moves when response fails; and
- how adaptation occurs without fragmenting the system.

The NLIF is not proposed as a new programme, institution, or mandate, nor is it intended to override statutory authority. Rather, it is proposed to apply across existing ministries, directorates, boards, and agencies by governing how decisions taken within those mandates should behave when they affect learning integrity, equity, instructional time, assessment credibility, or system coherence.

In short, the Vision defines where the system is going. The NLIF is proposed as the means by which the system would govern itself while getting there.

2. The specific problem the NLIF is designed to correct

The NLIF is proposed in response to a system governance failure rather than a policy or vision gap.

Over time, the education system has accumulated initiatives, assessments, platforms, indicators, and reporting requirements faster than it has resolved foundational constraints. Expansion has often proceeded without consolidation. New expectations have been layered on top of unresolved weaknesses. Correction has frequently been displaced downward, absorbed informally by schools, teachers, and families.

This pattern has produced predictable consequences:
- reforms overlap before prerequisites are secure;
- pilots persist without decision;
- indicators multiply without triggering response;
- reporting burden grows without subtraction;
- exclusion remains invisible in aggregate data; and
- failure is explained rather than corrected.

These outcomes do not reflect weak intent or lack of effort. They reflect the absence of a binding discipline governing stopping, sequencing, and response under pressure.

The proposed NLIF seeks to introduce that discipline. Its purpose is to counter the tendency of the system to move forward without resolving what is already known to be failing, and to ensure that evidence of breakdown triggers response rather than marginal adaptation or deferral to future reforms.

3. The governing architecture of the NLIF

Part I of the NLIF is proposed to operate through a small set of binding rules that would apply across all reform domains if adopted.

Non-negotiables

The Framework proposes that the following conditions be treated as foundational and not subject to compromise. Decisions that materially weaken these conditions would not proceed under the NLIF, regardless of urgency, funding availability, or programme design.

In particular, the NLIF proposes that:

- **Foundational learning is prioritised**
  - Early-grade literacy and numeracy take precedence over expansion, enrichment, or acceleration.
  - Progression without mastery is treated as a system failure, not an individual deficit.
  - Later reform may not assume that foundational gaps will be corrected downstream.
- **Instructional time is protected**
  - Scheduled learning time may not be displaced by administrative demands, parallel initiatives, or reporting requirements.
  - Where instructional time is lost, recovery or removal of competing demands takes priority over adding new activity.
  - Persistent time loss triggers correction rather than explanation.
- **Curriculum, assessment, and progression remain coherent**
  - Curriculum scope, textbooks, assessments, and promotion rules must align in practice.
  - Assessment signals may not override curriculum intent through behavioural pressure.
  - Misalignment requires formal resolution rather than informal coping at school level.
- **Assessment credibility is preserved**
  - Assessment exists to support learning and provide trustworthy signals to families and institutions.
  - Practices that inflate results, destabilise standards, or encourage teaching to the test are not permitted.
  - Expansion of high-stakes assessment is prohibited until instructional conditions are stable.
- **Equity and inclusion are enforced, not assumed**
  - Enrolment is not treated as evidence of inclusion.
  - Minimum accommodations for disability, language access, safety, and readiness must be visible and enforced.
  - Persistent exclusion without response constitutes a governance failure.

- **Accumulation is bounded through substitution**
    - New initiatives, platforms, indicators, or reporting requirements may proceed only where existing ones are consolidated, replaced, or exited.
    - Layering without retirement is explicitly disallowed.
    - Complexity and burden are treated as system risks, not implementation inconveniences.
- **Ownership for response is explicit**
    - For every learning benchmark or system signal, a responsible institution must be identified.
    - Responsibility may not be deferred, diffused, or shifted downward to schools without authority.
    - Silence or delay is treated as non-response.
- **Pilots end in decision**
    - All pilots and initiatives must culminate in a decision to scale, adapt, or stop.
    - Indefinite continuation without evidence constitutes a governance failure.
    - Exit from ineffective initiatives is treated as system strength, not weakness.

These non-negotiables define the boundaries within which discretion may be exercised. They are intended to protect learning integrity, system coherence, and public trust when reform is under political, administrative, or fiscal pressure.

Phase discipline

The NLIF proposes that all reform activity be governed through a three-phase logic that regulates what kinds of decisions may be taken over time.

- **Phase 1: Stabilisation and credibility**
    - Establishes minimum practice expectations and signal integrity.
    - Limits indicators, pilots, and expansion.
    - Prohibits permanent structures, major platforms, or high-stakes escalation.
- **Phase 2: Improvement and convergence**
    - Focuses on consistency across classrooms, schools, and jurisdictions.
    - Consolidates effective practices and exits ineffective ones.
    - Aligns curriculum, assessment, supervision, and support.
- **Phase 3: Accountability and consolidation**
    - Embeds stabilised practices into durable structures.
    - Permits efficiency gains and stronger accountability mechanisms.
    - Prohibits expansion if learning benchmarks deteriorate.

Advancement between phases would not be automatic and would depend on evidence that minimum expectations are holding and response mechanisms are functioning.

Minimum practice expectations

Across key domains such as foundational learning, equity, family interface, digital enablement, and pathways, the NLIF proposes to define what must become normal before further reform proceeds.

These expectations:

- define the floor for credibility rather than aspirational best practice;
- make weak learning conditions visible earlier;
- stabilise routines and reduce overload; and
- convert known failure from tolerance into obligation to act.

Where minimum practice expectations do not hold, the proposed response is correction or pause, not escalation of expectations.

Substitution and burden control

The NLIF proposes to treat burden as a governing signal.

- Monitoring that does not trigger decision would be removed.
- New indicators would require retirement of existing ones.
- Digital systems would not duplicate data already collected elsewhere.
- Administrative compliance may not displace instructional focus.

Taken together, these elements constitute the core discipline of Part I. They are intended to ensure that, if adopted, reform activity would be constrained, sequenced, and credible, rather than expansive, symbolic, or self-undermining.

4. How the NLIF binds reform across key system domains

Part II of the Framework sets out how the proposed governing discipline would apply across the core domains through which learning outcomes are shaped in practice. These chapters do not introduce separate reform agendas. They illustrate how the NLIF's non-negotiables, phase discipline, and minimum practice expectations would operate in system areas where failure has historically accumulated.

Across all domains, Phase 1 is proposed to establish minimum conditions for credibility and control. Phase 2 would focus on convergence and consistency. Phase 3 would consolidate effective practice and apply accountability once stability is demonstrated.

Foundational learning and early grade mastery (Chapter 6)
Foundational learning is treated as the highest-leverage domain.

- Phase 1 would prioritise protected instructional time, early visibility of learning gaps, and prevention of progression without mastery.
- Phase 2–3 would converge pedagogy, supervision, curriculum, and materials around literacy and numeracy mastery and institutionalise early-grade protection.

Instructional time protection and school operations (Chapter 7)
Instructional time is proposed as a non-negotiable system resource.

- Phase 1 would enforce delivery of scheduled instructional time and recovery of lost time.
- Phase 2–3 would embed time protection into supervision, administrative routines, and system responses to disruption.

Teachers and professional conditions (Chapter 8)
Professional responsibility is proposed to be governed through minimum conditions.

- Phase 1 would establish expectations for teacher presence, posting stability, and instructional supervision.
- Phase 2–3 would converge coaching, supervision, and professional development around classroom practice.

Curriculum and materials coherence (Chapter 9)
Curriculum overload and misalignment are treated as system-level failures.

- Phase 1 would enforce scope–time feasibility and block expansion without subtraction.
- Phase 2–3 would consolidate content and lock curriculum–textbook–assessment coherence.

Assessment stability, trust, and integrity (Chapter 10)
Assessment signals are proposed to be governed to support learning.

- Phase 1 would stabilise assessment formats and prevent premature high-stakes expansion.
- Phase 2–3 would converge assessment systems and institutionalise moderation and integrity safeguards.

Equity, inclusion, and language access (Chapter 11)
Silent exclusion is proposed to be made visible and actionable.

- Phase 1 would enforce minimum accommodations.
- Phase 2–3 would scale enforcement and embed equity requirements into routine governance.

Family interface and demand-side trust (Chapter 12)
Family behaviour is treated as responsive to system signals.

- Phase 1 would restore clarity in learning expectations and feedback.
- Phase 2–3 would converge messages across curriculum, assessment, and reporting.

Digital enablement, disciplined (Chapter 13)
Digital systems are proposed to be governed as service infrastructure.

- Phase 1 would enforce consolidation, burden reduction, and retirement of duplicative systems.
- Phase 2–3 would integrate platforms into a small, interoperable digital estate.

Pathway coherence, retention, and transitions (Chapter 14)
Learner loss at transition points is proposed to be treated as an owned system failure.

- Phase 1 would make exits visible and define minimum recovery routes.
- Phase 2–3 would align pathways and consolidate second-chance mechanisms.

Together, these domains illustrate how the NLIF's proposed governing rules would operate where learning failure is produced and reproduced. They are intended to bind reform activity rather than expand it.

5. How the NLIF proposes to enforce behaviour

The NLIF proposes to convert evidence into obligation through deliberately limited monitoring and binding response rules.

Signals, not metrics: Under the proposed Framework, a signal is a rule, routine, or incentive that shapes behaviour in practice. Signals would be monitored only where deviation would distort learning, equity, or system credibility. Indicators that do not inform a decision or plausibly trigger response would be excluded by design.

Benchmarks and response windows: Each authorised signal would be paired with a minimum benchmark and a response window. Benchmarks would define adequacy rather than excellence. Response windows would convert deviation into obligation, with defined timelines for review, corrective action, and escalation.

Automatic escalation and pause authority: Where response does not occur within the defined window, the Framework proposes that authority move automatically to the next level capable of resolution. Silence would be treated as non-response. Approvals, rollouts, and expansions would be paused where non-negotiables are breached.

Burden protection: Monitoring would be subject to strict burden controls. Measurement that does not trigger decision would be removed. New signals would require retirement of existing ones. Digital systems would not duplicate data already collected elsewhere.

These mechanisms are intended to ensure that behaviour is governed under routine pressure, not only during reform launches.

6. Adaptation without fragmentation

The NLIF proposes to permit adaptation, but only within strict bounds. Adaptation would be triggered only by evidence generated through authorised signals and enforcement routines. It would be time-bound and would conclude with one of three decisions:

- continue;
- adjust; or
- stop.

Indefinite piloting, redesign without decision, or extension without evidence would not be permitted. Learning that does not result in behavioural change would be archived and removed from decision processes.

Adaptation could change routines, instruments, sequencing, or implementation design, but would not reopen non-negotiables, weaken minimum practice expectations, introduce parallel systems, or increase burden through additional reporting.

Exit from ineffective initiatives is proposed to be treated as a sign of system strength. Retention of failure would be treated as a governance failure.

7. What adoption of the NLIF would commit the system to

If adopted, the NLIF would commit the education system to governing reform differently.

It would commit leaders and institutions to:

- pause expansion when foundations are not holding;
- act on evidence within defined timeframes;
- move authority when response fails;
- consolidate before adding;
- retire initiatives that do not work; and
- protect learning credibility over visibility.

It would also commit the system to discontinuing certain practices. Accumulation without substitution, monitoring without decision, pilots without exits, and silent absorption of burden at school level would no longer be treated as acceptable.

The NLIF does not propose faster reform or greater activity. It proposes restraint, correction, and credibility. Its value lies not in what it would add to the system, but in what it would prevent the system from doing to itself.

The Committee submits this Framework on the view that the success of the education reform package will depend not only on the strength of the Vision, but on whether a discipline of this kind is adopted to govern how reform is carried forward over time.

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PART I: HOW THE NATIONAL LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK (NLIF) GOVERNS CHANGE

Chapter 1. Purpose, Scope, and Institutional Role of the National Learning Implementation Framework

1.1 Why the NLIF exists

Volume I of this Report (the Vision) establishes the governing commitments required to improve learning. It sets direction, diagnoses why learning outcomes have remained weak despite expansion, and identifies what must be protected if improvement is to be sustained. In doing so, it answers the question of what the education system must ultimately deliver for learners.

The proposed NLIF, set out in Volume II of this Report, addresses the complementary question of how those governing commitments are translated into disciplined, system-wide implementation over time.

Bangladesh's education system is large, politically visible, and administratively layered. Authority is distributed across ministries, divisions, directorates, boards, and technical agencies. Decisions that affect learning are routinely taken in different parts of the system, on different timelines, and for different institutional reasons. Curriculum and textbook decisions sit with one set of bodies, assessment and certification with others, implementation capacity elsewhere, and data and reporting requirements frequently follow their own internal logic. In such a system, coherence does not emerge automatically. It must be governed.

This is where reforms most commonly fail. Reform intent is often articulated clearly, but the system's day-to-day signals remain misaligned.[1] Initiatives proliferate, guidance accumulates, pilots continue without resolution, and contradictions are managed informally rather than addressed. Over time, responsibility for coherence shifts downward. Teachers, school leaders, and families are left to reconcile expectations they did not create, relying on informal coping strategies that may stabilise short-term survival but rarely strengthen learning.

The core problem is therefore the absence of a shared implementation discipline that governs how reforms are sequenced, constrained, adapted, and concluded, so that learning improvement is not continually traded away through delay, layering, or misalignment. The proposed NLIF is intended to provide that discipline.

1.2 What the NLIF does

The NLIF is not proposed as another reform programme layered onto an already crowded system. It does not prescribe specific projects, technologies, or delivery partners, and it does not manage delivery at the level of individual schools. Its function is structural and governing in intent. It is designed to establish a common logic that institutions are expected to use when deciding what to approve, what to defer, what to scale, and what to stop.

In practical terms, the NLIF is intended to govern decision-making by anchoring reforms to learning outcomes rather than inputs, translating the Vision's commitments into observable benchmarks, disciplining experimentation so that pilots lead to decisions rather than delay, and

[1] In this document, *system signals* refer to the rules, routines, and incentives through which the education system communicates what matters in practice. They are not directives or policy statements. Signals shape behaviour by default — through curriculum scope, assessment formats, instructional time, progression rules, reporting requirements, and the distribution of discretion and support — even in the absence of instruction or directives.

sequencing reform over time so that clarity precedes routines and routines precede structural or high-stakes reform.

Through this shift, implementation is intended to move away from an activity-driven model of reform and toward a learning-driven model of sequencing, feedback, and correction.

1.3 What the NLIF is not

The NLIF is not intended to be a sector plan, a financing strategy, or a donor coordination document. It does not replace annual development programmes, medium-term budget frameworks, or ministry work plans, and it does not reinterpret statutory mandates.

It is also not a menu of initiatives. It does not offer a catalogue of programmes to be selected or adapted. Instead, it is intended to sit above individual projects and provide a shared governing frame through which ministries, divisions, directorates, boards, and technical agencies are expected to determine whether initiatives belong within the agreed reform pathway. Under the proposed framework, no initiative should be considered aligned with the NLIF unless it demonstrably replaces, consolidates, or rationalises existing activity, rather than adding to it.

The NLIF should not be cited selectively to justify initiatives that do not meet its decision discipline or sequencing logic. Alignment under the NLIF refers to demonstrable contribution to learning benchmarks and adherence to phase constraints, not rhetorical consistency with Vision language. Initiatives that reference the NLIF without meeting its requirements should be considered misaligned.

Any programme or project may exist under the NLIF only if it strengthens learning outcomes, fits within the sequencing logic set out in this Framework, and remains subject to review, redesign, or closure based on evidence.

1.4 Who the NLIF applies to

The proposed NLIF governs learning-relevant decisions taken across Bangladesh's education system once adopted as a government-wide instrument, irrespective of which ministry or statutory body exercises the decision.

The Framework is intended to apply to decisions taken by the Ministry of Education and its divisions, directorates, boards, and affiliated bodies. It is also intended to apply to decisions taken by other ministries and statutory bodies where those decisions materially affect learning outcomes, curriculum scope, assessment signals, instructional time, progression, or system coherence**.** The NLIF does not replace statutory mandates, lines of authority, or existing legal responsibilities. Institutions retain full responsibility within their mandates. The NLIF is intended to govern how learning-relevant decisions are sequenced, tested, corrected, and concluded, and how learning-critical interfaces are resolved.

The NLIF does not replace statutory mandates, lines of authority, or existing legal responsibilities. Institutions retain full responsibility within their respective mandates. Once adopted, the NLIF is intended to govern how learning-relevant decisions are sequenced, assessed, and coordinated at system interfaces, not who holds formal authority.

This distinction is deliberate. Many of the most persistent learning failures in Bangladesh do not arise from individual mandate breaches, but from uncoordinated decisions taken independently across institutions, each acting within its remit. The NLIF is proposed to govern these interactions explicitly, ensuring that lawful decisions taken by one part of the system do not inadvertently undermine learning, coherence, or reform sequencing elsewhere.

1.5 The operating logic of the NLIF

All decisions governed by the NLIF are intended to follow a common operational logic: the Vision defines the learning North Star; the NLIF translates that direction into system benchmarks; initiatives exist to move those benchmarks; effective practices are stabilised through routines; and only then does the system invest in scale, permanence, or efficiency.

Pilots are therefore instruments for system learning and decision, rather than symbols of action in themselves. Structural reforms, platforms, and permanent arrangements are sequenced deliberately, with large-scale or irreversible investments deferred until learning-relevant behaviours are stable and credible evidence exists.

Initiatives that cannot be meaningfully situated within this sequence, or that bypass it by prioritising scale, visibility, or efficiency before learning is secured, are not governed as core NLIF instruments and require separate justification.

1.6 Why sequencing matters in Bangladesh

Learning systems are coordinated not primarily through policy statements, but through a small number of powerful system signals. In Bangladesh, curriculum expectations, assessment practices, instructional time, and progression rules shape behaviour far more decisively than reform rhetoric.

When these signals are unstable or misaligned, additional initiatives amplify rather than resolve problems. Teachers are forced to interpret expectations rather than enact them, classrooms narrow toward what is examinable, families hedge through private tutoring, and later grades are asked to compensate for earlier failure. Sequencing is therefore not a moderation of ambition. It is a condition for ambition to survive contact with reality.

1.7 Relationship to the Vision

The Vision establishes governing authority and non-negotiable commitments. The NLIF is intended to establish implementation discipline. It does not reinterpret, soften, or reopen the Vision. Its sole purpose is to operationalise it over time, while protecting learning integrity, system coherence, and public trust.

Chapter 2. Non-Negotiables and Decision Discipline

2.1 Why non-negotiables are required

The NLIF is built around a small number of system conditions that must hold if learning improvement is to be credible and sustained. These conditions are not policy preferences, technical ideals, or aspirational statements. They are governance requirements derived from repeated reform failure in large, politically exposed education systems.

When these conditions do not hold, effort and investment fail to translate into learning. Signals conflict, behaviour narrows toward the most punitive demand, and responsibility is displaced downward to schools and teachers who lack the authority to resolve contradictions. In such contexts, monitoring proliferates without response, pilots continue without conclusion, and reform becomes an accumulation of activity rather than a pathway to improvement.

Non-negotiables exist to prevent this outcome. They define the minimum system conditions under which reform may proceed and the boundaries within which discretion may be exercised. Initiatives that violate these conditions should not be approved, regardless of intent, visibility, or external pressure.

2.2 The NLIF non-negotiables

All decisions governed by the NLIF are expected to be subject to the following non-negotiable conditions.

First, *foundational learning must be protected*. Early-grade literacy and numeracy take precedence over expansion, enrichment, or acceleration. Reforms that weaken foundations, defer remediation, or assume later correction should not be permitted.

Second, *instructional time must be protected.* Scheduled learning time may not be eroded through administrative demands, parallel initiatives, or reporting requirements. Where time loss is identified, removal of competing demands takes priority over adding new activity.

Third, *curriculum, assessment, and progression must be coherent.* Curriculum expectations, textbooks, assessments, and promotion rules must align. Where misalignment exists, assessment may not override curriculum intent in practice. Formal resolution is required.

Fourth, *assessment signals must retain credibility*. Assessment exists to support learning and provide trustworthy signals to learners, families, and institutions. Practices that inflate results, destabilise standards, or encourage teaching-to-the-test are not permitted.

Fifth, *accumulation must be bounded.* New initiatives may proceed only where they replace, consolidate, or retire existing activity. Layering without substitution should not be permitted.

Sixth, *ownership for response must be explicit.* For every learning benchmark and system signal, a responsible institution must be identified. Responsibility for response may not be deferred or shifted downward.

Seventh, *exit and redesign must be enforced.* Pilots and initiatives must culminate in a decision to scale, adapt, or stop. Indefinite continuation without evidence constitutes a governance failure.

These non-negotiables apply uniformly across ministries, divisions, directorates, boards, and technical agencies. No exception should be permitted on the basis of mandate, funding source, or political urgency.

2.3 Mandatory decision discipline

To protect the non-negotiable learning commitments of the Vision, the NLIF is intended to apply a mandatory decision discipline to proposals seeking approval, renewal, or expansion where learning outcomes are materially affected. Proposals may proceed only when they meet minimum requirements for learning contribution and system coherence. Under the NLIF, proposals proceed only if they meet two conditions:

- **Learning contribution:** The proposal must demonstrate a credible and explicit pathway to improving learning outcomes. This includes specifying the learning outcome it seeks to improve, the benchmark it intends to shift, the barrier to learning being addressed, and the behavioural change expected at the level of classrooms, institutions, or system actors.
- **System fit:** The proposal must clearly state how it relates to existing initiatives, structures, or routines. This includes identifying what the initiative replaces, consolidates, integrates into, or newly provides. Proposals that add activity without strengthening learning or clarifying their effect on system coherence are treated as incomplete.

In addition, proposals must define how progress will be assessed, including the feedback mechanisms to be used and the indicative timeframe within which evidence will be reviewed. Proposals must also indicate the sequencing phase to which the initiative belongs and confirm alignment with the constraints of that phase.

Proposals framed solely in terms of activities, inputs, or expenditure, without a clear learning pathway and system account, are not considered complete. Initiatives that introduce new structures, platforms, mandates, or reporting requirements must demonstrate how they rationalise, replace, or integrate with existing arrangements, rather than creating parallel systems.

These requirements are intended to be applied through existing approval and review processes. The NLIF does not establish additional committees or parallel structures. It provides a shared decision frame to ensure that approvals strengthen learning outcomes while protecting system coherence over time.

2.4 Indicators as tools for governing learning delivery.

Under the NLIF, education is treated as a public service, and the service being delivered is learning, not schooling activity. Indicators are used to help government determine whether that service is being delivered at an acceptable level and to identify where delivery is degrading, disrupted, or being sustained only through informal coping.

Indicators are not performance scorecards. They are not used to rank schools, teachers, or learners, nor to allocate blame. Their purpose is to make learning and system conditions visible early enough to require response, support, correction, or escalation before degradation becomes normalised. Under the NLIF, indicators are intended to have governing force only insofar as they trigger obligation to act.

The NLIF assumes that indicators operate in environments with incentives and strategic behaviour. Where consequences attach to visibility, there will be pressure to delay, reinterpret, or obscure learning deficits. For this reason, indicators are treated as instruments of governance rather than neutral measures. Their interpretation, triangulation, and use are explicitly governed functions, not technical exercises.

Indicators focus on learning and system conditions rather than outcomes alone. They make visible whether the conditions required for learning are present in practice. For example, a sustained absence of appointed head teachers across a district, prolonged instructional time loss due to staffing gaps, or systematic delays in the delivery of learning materials signal degradation in learning delivery even where schools remain open and instruction continues. By focusing on conditions, the NLIF reduces reliance on easily inflated outcome measures and surfaces degradation that is otherwise absorbed through informal adjustment.

The NLIF distinguishes between indicators used for public signalling and those used for internal governance. A small, stable set of indicators is used publicly to show direction, surface system-level learning risks, and maintain credibility. These indicators are reported at aggregate or geographic levels, such as districts or regions, rather than at the level of individual schools. Public indicators focus on whether the learning service is functioning at a basic level and whether risks are persistent or widespread. Examples include leadership coverage across an area, instructional time delivered, early-grade learning attainment at regional level, staffing stability, and progression with evidence of minimum learning achievement. Where relevant, a limited indicator of administrative or reporting burden may also be included to signal when measurement itself is undermining learning delivery.

A broader set of indicators is used internally for governance. These internal indicators support decision-making, trigger review, and guide response. They are not designed to demonstrate success, but to detect deterioration, misalignment, or overload. Their purpose is to answer a simple governing question: is the learning service being delivered at an acceptable level, and if not, what response is required now.

Indicators acquire governing force through benchmarks. A benchmark defines the point at which response becomes mandatory. Benchmarks are not aspirational targets and may not be explained away through contextual narrative alone. When a benchmark is missed, it signals that learning delivery is at risk and that corrective action is required.

Under the NLIF, weak learning conditions are not treated as failure. Failure to respond to visible degradation is. For this reason, every benchmark must have a clearly identified institutional owner, a defined response window, and an explicit escalation pathway. When a benchmark is missed, the responsible institution would be required to initiate corrective action within a specified timeframe, typically 30–60 days, and to document the response taken. Where response does not occur within this window, or where the same condition persists without effective adaptation, escalation would be mandatory.

Community visibility plays a supplementary role in this process. While responsibility for learning delivery and response rests entirely with the state, community feedback and local observation can surface service disruptions and degraded learning conditions that may not be immediately visible through administrative channels. Under the NLIF, such feedback is treated as an additional signal that may trigger review and response, not as a mechanism for shifting responsibility or allocating blame.

Through this design, the NLIF does not assume perfect data or incentive-free behaviour. It assumes pressure, distortion, and resistance, and governs indicators accordingly. Visibility is treated as a means to require response, not as an end in itself.

2.5 Responding when learning delivery falls below acceptable quality

When indicators show that learning delivery is disrupted or delivered at an unacceptable quality, the first obligation of the system is to restore acceptable learning conditions. In many contexts, schools continue to operate and instruction continues to occur, but under conditions that undermine learning. Late delivery of textbooks, partial curriculum coverage, reliance on untrained substitutes, compressed syllabi, or prolonged interim arrangements may allow activity to continue while learning quality is compromised. Under the NLIF, such degraded delivery is treated as a service failure and requires response, irrespective of whether schooling activity continues or local coping arrangements are in place.

Response is not delayed until learning delivery ceases altogether, nor is informal coping treated as resolution. Coping arrangements may stabilise activity in the short term, but under the NLIF they are treated as indicators of system failure rather than evidence of resilience. The fact that schools or teachers are managing under degraded conditions does not discharge the system's responsibility to restore acceptable learning delivery.

The NLIF does not require immediate or permanent solutions before action is taken. Where learning quality is at risk, interim or temporary measures may be necessary to stabilise delivery while longer-term issues are addressed. However, such measures are expected to protect learning quality to the extent possible and to prevent further degradation, not merely maintain continuity of activity or preserve administrative schedules.

For example, where leadership vacancies persist across an area, interim appointments or delegated authority arrangements may be required to stabilise instructional oversight and school functioning. Where instructional time is being lost or learning materials arrive late, temporary distribution mechanisms, alternative approved materials, adjusted pacing guidance, or compensatory instructional time may be required to restore learning conditions while procurement, staffing, or administrative issues are resolved.

The NLIF requires that the responsible institution formally acknowledge the service degradation, specify what corrective action will be taken, and act within an agreed timeframe. Initial response focuses on support, correction, and stabilisation rather than sanction. Escalation occurs only where there is no response, where action is repeatedly delayed, or where degraded learning conditions persist without adaptation. The NLIF assumes that incentives may exist to delay acknowledgement, reframe degradation, or defer response. For this reason, response obligations are time-bound and escalation is linked to persistence and non-adaptation, not to the severity of the initial condition alone. Explanation without corrective action does not constitute response.

Once minimum acceptable learning conditions have been stabilised, the system can then address underlying causes, including workforce planning, governance arrangements, financing constraints, supply chains, or policy reform. The NLIF deliberately separates restoring learning quality from explaining why learning was degraded, recognising that these processes operate on different timelines and require different tools.

As with indicators used for monitoring, measurement during response is itself governed under the NLIF. Indicators and reporting requirements must support timely response to degraded learning conditions, not overwhelm schools or administrators. New indicators, platforms, or reporting systems may be introduced only where they replace existing ones and reduce overall burden. No indicator is retained if it does not inform a decision or prompt action.

Through this response discipline, the NLIF makes it difficult for degraded learning delivery to persist without response, even where incentives favour delay, deflection, or informal coping, while allowing government to act pragmatically under real institutional and political constraints.

2.6 Implications for implementation discipline

The NLIF does not assume goodwill, capacity, or seamless coordination. It assumes pressure, resistance, and institutional friction. By embedding non-negotiables and decision discipline into how approvals are granted, indicators are used, and responses are required, the Framework protects learning improvement from dilution and shifts reform away from activity and towards outcomes.

Chapter 3. Operational Theory of Change

3.1 Why a system-level theory of change is required

Learning improvement does not arise automatically from policy intent, resource allocation, or programme activity. In large and administratively layered education systems, inputs only matter to the extent that they change behaviour at scale. Where behaviour does not change, learning outcomes remain largely unaffected, regardless of effort or expenditure.

Bangladesh's reform experience reflects this pattern. Access has expanded, curricula have been revised, assessments introduced, technologies piloted, and spending increased. Yet learning outcomes remain weak and uneven. The failure has been one of translation: reform activity has not consistently altered classroom practice, institutional decision-making, or the signals that shape everyday behaviour across the system.

The NLIF therefore makes its theory of change explicit. It does not assume that programmes or policies will produce improvement by default. It specifies the behavioural pathways through which improvement must occur and embeds governance mechanisms to ensure those pathways are activated, monitored, and corrected over time.

3.2 The NLIF theory of change

The NLIF adopts a closed-loop operational theory of change rather than a linear delivery pipeline. Learning improvement is governed through a recurring cycle in which inputs act on behaviour; behaviour produces learning and system conditions; those conditions are made visible through indicators; and indicators trigger mandatory institutional response, including adaptation where required, until effective behaviours stabilise.

- **Inputs** include policies, guidance, materials, training, resources, and institutional decisions. These inputs are necessary but not sufficient. Their relevance depends on whether they alter behaviour in ways that support learning.
- **Behaviour** refers to how teachers use instructional time, pace lessons, provide feedback, and engage learners; how school leaders protect learning conditions and supervise practice; how officials approve, sequence, and adapt initiatives; and how families and learners respond to system signals related to curriculum scope, assessment pressure, and progression rules.
- **Learning and system conditions** reflect the effects of behaviour in practice. These include instructional time delivered, leadership coverage, curriculum coverage, material availability, assessment use, learning outcomes, and broader measures of system integrity. These conditions exist regardless of whether they are formally acknowledged.
- **Indicators** are the means through which learning and system conditions are made visible for governance. Indicators are designed to surface deterioration, misalignment, overload, or stagnation early enough to force response rather than explanation.
- **Response** is the institutional action triggered when indicators show that learning delivery is at risk. Response may include support, correction, interim stabilisation, escalation, or **adaptation**, including redesign, recalibration, or termination of initiatives.
- **Stabilisation** occurs when effective behaviours become routine, predictable, and less dependent on individual actors. Only once stabilisation is evident does the system invest in scale, permanence, or structural reform.

Once the NLIF is adopted, any initiative that cannot be situated within this loop does not meet NLIF requirements and may not proceed. The practical implications of this loop are easiest to see at the level of individual initiatives and are illustrated through the practical example below.

Illustrative example: An initiative to motivate students to study more

Consider a proposed initiative intended to motivate lower-secondary students to study more regularly, using short classroom activities, teacher prompts, and modest recognition. Under the NLIF, the initiative is governed as follows.

1. Inputs must specify an explicit behavioural pathway: The initiative may proceed only if it clearly identifies whose behaviour is expected to change, what change is expected (for example, more regular study time or consistent teacher reinforcement), and how that behavioural change is expected to improve learning. Inputs such as training or materials are not treated as outcomes; their relevance depends entirely on whether they alter behaviour in learning-supportive ways.

2. Behaviour produces learning conditions: If behaviour changes, this should be reflected in observable learning conditions, such as more consistent homework completion, improved instructional pacing, or reduced reliance on last-minute exam preparation. Schools may continue to operate regardless, but learning conditions may improve, stagnate, or deteriorate.

3. Conditions are made visible through indicators: The initiative must specify how learning conditions will be monitored, for example through sampled data on homework completion, classroom use, or instructional pacing. Indicators are not used to reward or rank schools. Their sole purpose is to determine whether behaviour is changing in ways that improve learning conditions.

4. Indicators trigger mandatory response: If indicators show improvement, the initiative may continue provisionally. If behaviour does not change, or learning conditions deteriorate despite activity continuing, a response is mandatory. This may involve redesign or discontinuation. Continuing unchanged in the absence of evidence is not permitted.

5. Adaptation precedes scale: Adaptation may include narrowing scope, adjusting delivery, or withdrawing ineffective elements. Only where effective behaviours stabilise and learning conditions improve predictably does the system consider embedding or scaling the initiative.

This example illustrates how, under the NLIF, initiatives would be governed not by intent or activity, but by their demonstrated effect on behaviour and learning conditions. Failure is not penalised; failure to respond is.

3.3 Why feedback fails without governance

In Bangladesh's education system, feedback has historically failed to drive improvement for three recurrent reasons.

- First, feedback is slow. Data are often collected annually or aggregated over long cycles, limiting their usefulness for timely response.
- Second, feedback is weakly linked to authority. Information flows upward, but responsibility for response is frequently diffuse, contested, or deferred.
- Third, monitoring substitutes for action. Reporting compliance is treated as evidence of progress, while underlying problems persist without resolution. Pilots continue without closure, absorbing attention but producing little system learning.

The cumulative effect is a system that learns to wait rather than act. Evidence accumulates, but behaviour does not change because no institution is required to respond within a defined timeframe.

3.4 Feedback, response, and adaptation under the NLIF

The NLIF proposes to redesign feedback to serve governance rather than documentation. Feedback mechanisms must be short-cycle, decision-linked, and institutionally owned.

Indicators are expected to become visible within weeks or a school term, not years. Each indicator is assigned to a responsible institution with a clear obligation to respond. Early signals trigger support and corrective action. Escalation follows only where response is absent or repeatedly ineffective.

Adaptation under the NLIF is not discretionary. It is a required system response to evidence. Adaptation may involve revising pacing, adjusting curriculum scope, strengthening support, modifying routines, consolidating initiatives, or redesigning approaches that are not producing expected behavioural or learning change.

Adaptation does not include redefining success, changing indicators to avoid accountability, or postponing decisions. Repeated failure to improve, or failure to adapt in response to evidence, constitutes a governance failure and triggers redesign or exit under the escalation mechanisms defined in Chapter 2.

3.5 Stabilisation before scale

A core discipline of the NLIF is the requirement that effective practices stabilise before they are scaled. Scaling unstable practices multiplies inconsistency, increases administrative burden, and undermines trust.

Structural reforms, digital platforms, new mandates, and permanent institutional arrangements are therefore reserved for later phases, once behaviours are predictable and routines are embedded. Under the NLIF, scale is an outcome of discipline, not a substitute for it.

The NLIF explicitly excludes activity-driven programmes without a clear behavioural pathway, pilots without time-bound decision points, technology-first reforms that do not protect instructional time, assessment reforms not aligned with curriculum and instruction, and reforms that rely on exceptional individuals rather than system routines.

These exclusions are governance constraints, not judgments of intent. Their purpose is to protect learning improvement from dilution.

3.6 Closing

The NLIF theory of change assumes pressure, resistance, and imperfect coordination. By making behaviour, feedback, adaptation, and stabilisation explicit objects of governance, it shifts reform from aspiration to discipline and provides a credible pathway through which learning improvement can be sustained rather than repeatedly announced and quietly abandoned.

Chapter 4. Sequencing Logic and Indicator Architecture

4.1 Why sequencing and indicators must be governed together

In large, politically exposed education systems, sequencing and measurement cannot be treated as separate technical functions. Indicators that are not tied to sequencing invite performative compliance. Sequencing decisions taken without disciplined signals invite escalation driven by pressure rather than evidence.

Under the NLIF, sequencing logic and indicator architecture are intended to operate as a single governance system. System signals reveal how the system is functioning in practice. Sequencing rules determine what decisions those signals permit, constrain, or prohibit at different points in time. Together, they protect coherence, prevent premature escalation, and ensure that improvement stabilises before scale. This integration is central to the NLIF's purpose. It shifts reform away from activity accumulation and toward deliberate, evidence-governed change.

4.2 The three phases as governance controls

The NLIF proposes a five-year horizon structured into three phases. These phases are not programme stages, workplans, or delivery milestones. They function as governance controls that regulate what kinds of decisions may be taken, based on the credibility of system signals and the stability of behaviour.

Progression between phases is conditional rather than automatic. Advancement depends on evidence that benchmarks are being met and that response mechanisms are functioning. Delay is preferable to distortion.

Table 4.1: NLIF phases as governance controls

Phase	Primary Governance Objective	Core permissions	Core constraints
Phase 1 (Year 1 and 2)	Signal clarity and credibility	Limited indicators; time-bound, decision-bound pilots; instructional time protection	No new permanent structures; no major platforms; no high-stakes expansion
Phase 2 (Year 3 and 4)	Stabilisation and convergence	Consolidation of effective practices; alignment of curriculum, assessment, supervision; capacity reallocation	No initiative layering; no expansion without substitution
Phase 3 (Year 5)	Institutionalisation and efficiency	Structural reform; platform scaling; stronger accountability mechanisms	No expansion if benchmarks deteriorate

Note: Phase constraints apply once the NLIF is adopted as a governing framework.

The five-year horizon reflects a *best-case governance trajectory,* not a guaranteed timetable. Slippage in response, signal integrity, or behavioural stabilisation pauses progression.

4.3 Indicator architecture as a system of signals

Indicator principles, response discipline, and burden control are established in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter specifies how indicators function collectively to generate system signals for sequencing, approvals, and decision hatches.

The NLIF indicator architecture spans the system conditions that shape learning in practice. Indicators are organised into the following families:

- **Learning outcomes**: foundational literacy and numeracy, comprehension, application, retention, continuity.
- **Learner behaviour**: attendance, engagement, participation, early disengagement.
- **Classroom practice**: instructional time delivered, pacing, interaction, feedback, routine stability.
- **Teacher conditions and support**: deployment stability, workload, absenteeism, supervision, coaching.
- **Assessment use and integrity**: alignment with curriculum and instruction, grading stability, behavioural distortion.
- **Readiness and inclusion**: early preparation, nutrition, wellbeing, safety, disability accommodation, shock exposure.
- **Family interface**: communication clarity, trust, reliance on private tutoring, household education burden.
- **Curriculum coherence**: scope, density, pacing feasibility, alignment with textbooks and assessments.
- **Digital enablement and burden**: access, instructional usefulness, reporting duplication, system reliability.
- **Retention and dropout**: grade-specific exit, silent disengagement, transition loss, recovery.
- **System governance and responsiveness**: ownership clarity, response timeliness, cross-agency resolution, exit from failure, burden control.

The full indicator set will be used internally to guide approvals, trigger review, enforce sequencing discipline, and require correction. A limited subset is used publicly in early phases to establish direction and credibility without destabilising behaviour or data quality. It is important to note that some of these indicators currently exist, but others will need to be developed in due course.

Indicators operate only where linked to a decision trigger. Indicators that do not lead to review, correction, or escalation are removed. Detailed definitions, benchmarks, phase expectations, and trigger rules are set out in Annex A.

4.4 Phase-specific signal priorities across the five-year horizon

Phase 1 (Years 1–2): Signal integrity

The priority is clarity, not precision. The system must demonstrate that problems can be surfaced, acknowledged, and acted upon.

- Indicators are limited to those that can be measured consistently and interpreted clearly.

- Learning and behavioural signals take precedence over complex composite metrics.
- Imperfect data are not grounds for inaction.
- New indicators or platforms may be introduced only where they replace existing ones and reduce overall burden.

Phase 1 is complete only when evidence reliably triggers response within defined timeframes.

Phase 2 (Years 2–4): Stabilisation and convergence

The priority is reducing volatility and contradiction.

- Indicator trends are used to test whether behaviours are holding across contexts.
- Alignment across curriculum, assessment, supervision, and instruction is actively enforced.
- Ineffective or duplicative initiatives are exited.

Progression depends on stabilised behaviour, not programme completion.

Phase 3 (Years 4–5): Institutionalisation and efficiency

The priority is embedding what works without undermining signal integrity.

- Structural reforms and platforms are permitted only where they reinforce stabilised practice.
- Accountability mechanisms operate on credible, uncontested signals.
- Efficiency gains may proceed only where learning benchmarks are protected.

Expansion should not proceed if benchmarks deteriorate.

4.5 Benchmarks, triggers, and decision hatches

Benchmarks define the threshold at which the system must respond, not aspirational targets to be defended or explained away.

Under the NLIF, three types of triggers apply:

- *Review triggers*, which require diagnosis and clarification.
- *Corrective action triggers,* which require specific remedial action within a defined period.
- *Escalation triggers*, which activate higher-level authority where response is absent or repeatedly ineffective.

To prevent drift, all pilots and initiatives are subject to explicit decision hatches:

Table 4.2: Decision hatches under the NLIF

Decision hatch	Trigger condition	Required action
Scale	Benchmarks met and behaviours stabilised	Expand within phase constraints
Adapt	Partial or uneven progress	Redesign and retest
Exit	Repeated failure or adverse effects	Terminate or replace initiative

Failure to activate a decision hatch should be treated as a governance failure.

4.6 Preventing premature escalation

A recurring reform failure is escalation driven by political pressure, donor timelines, or symbolic ambition rather than evidence. The NLIF explicitly guards against this risk.

High-stakes reforms, including major digital systems, assessment expansion, and permanent organisational changes, should not proceed until prerequisite signal integrity and stabilisation conditions are met. Where escalation occurs without evidence, the NLIF requires pause, redesign, or reversal.

4.7 Implications for sequencing and system control

By governing sequencing and indicators as a single system, the NLIF protects learning improvement from dilution, distortion, and delay. It regulates what decisions may be taken, when they may be taken, and under what conditions, shifting reform away from accumulation and toward deliberate, evidence-driven change.

Chapter 5. System Map, Institutional Ownership, and Interface Discipline

5.1 Why system mapping and ownership matter

Bangladesh's education system operates through distributed statutory mandates and interacting institutions (see Chapter 1.4). Reform failure arises when responsibility across interacting institutions is implicit rather than explicit, allowing misalignment to persist without resolution. Curriculum expectations, textbooks, assessments, teacher deployment, supervision, data reporting, digital systems, and progression rules are decided by different bodies operating under different incentives and timelines. When these decisions are not governed collectively, interface failures externalise resolution costs to schools and teachers without corresponding authority to resolve contradictions.

The NLIF is designed to address this by assigning enforceable ownership at learning-critical interfaces and by proposing time-bound decision rules where mandates intersect.

5.2 Mandate boundaries and learning-critical interfaces

Bangladesh's education system is governed through distinct statutory mandates. The NLIF does not collapse these boundaries or create hierarchy between ministries. Its role is narrower: where lawful decisions taken within separate mandates interact to shape learning conditions, the NLIF is intended to require explicit interface ownership, time-bound resolution, and escalation to the appropriate authority within the relevant mandate.

5.3 The NLIF system map

Under the NLIF, institutions are intended to be mapped according to their role in governing learning outcomes rather than their administrative rank. For each learning benchmark or system signal, the Framework proposes explicit designation of:

- *Lead institution*, holding primary responsibility for response when benchmarks are not met.
- *Co-owning institutions*, whose mandates materially affect the same outcome or signal.
- *Decision authority*, holding final responsibility for resolution where response is delayed, contested, or ineffective.

This mapping does not alter statutory mandates. It governs how mandates interact in practice and how responsibility is exercised when learning outcomes are at risk. This mapping is a governance instrument, not an organisational chart.

5.4 Learning-critical institutional interfaces

Drawing on long-standing sector experience and repeated reform bottlenecks, the NLIF identifies, for governance purposes, a defined set of interfaces where misalignment has consistently undermined learning outcomes and where informal coordination has proven insufficient.

These interfaces are learning-critical because they determine whether curriculum intent, assessment signals, instructional time, and workload remain coherent at school level. Where they are not governed explicitly, assessment signals override curriculum intent, instructional time is eroded, workload accumulates, and responsibility shifts downward to schools and

teachers without authority to resolve contradictions. Institutional ownership and decision authority for these interfaces are set out in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Institutional ownership and decision authority for learning-critical interfaces under the NLIF

System interface	Lead institution	Co-owning institutions	Primary responsibility	Escalation forum (within mandate)
Curriculum design, scope, and sequencing	National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)	DPE; DSHE	Define learning objectives, scope, and sequencing aligned to feasible instructional time	MoPME (primary); MoE (secondary); Joint resolution forum (JRF).
Curriculum–textbook alignment	NCTB	DPE; DSHE	Ensure textbooks reflect approved curriculum, pacing, and task demands	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Textbook revision and rollout timing	NCTB	DPE; DSHE	Version control, revision cycles, and alignment with curriculum changes	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Curriculum–assessment alignment	NCTB	BISE; BMEB; BTEB	Ensure assessments test intended learning rather than content coverage	SHED / TMED
Assessment design and grading standards	BISE / BMEB / BTEB	NCTB; DSHE	Assessment formats, marking schemes, moderation, and standards stability	SHED / TMED
Assessment results and progression rules	BISE / BMEB / BTEB	DSHE; DPE	Alignment with promotion, certification, and remediation rules	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Foundational learning delivery (Grades 1–3)	DPE	NCTB; NAPE	Instructional time, deployment, supervision, early-grade routines	MoPME
Instructional time protection	DPE / DSHE	School leadership; local administration	Protection of scheduled instructional minutes	DPE / DSHE
Teacher deployment and posting stability	DPE / DSHE	Ministry-level HR units	Posting, transfers, minimum tenure in priority grades	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Teacher workload and reporting requirements	DPE / DSHE	BANBEIS; technical agencies	Consolidation and removal of low-value reporting	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Instructional supervision and coaching	DPE / DSHE	NAPE; NAEM	Observation coverage, feedback quality, coaching access	DPE / DSHE

Education data standards and reporting	BANBEIS	DPE; DSHE; exam boards	Data definitions, consistency, reporting discipline	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Use of learning evidence in approvals	Approving authority	BANBEIS	Learning evidence required and used in decisions	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Digital platforms affecting instruction	DPE / DSHE	BCC; vendors	Burden control, substitution, instructional feasibility	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Student progression at transition points	DSHE / DPE	Examination boards	Prevent learning-linked dropout	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Inclusion and accommodation compliance	DPE / DSHE	Schools; local administration	Minimum accessibility and accommodation standards	MoPME; MoE; JRF
Cross-agency misalignment resolution	Lead institution (by issue)	All co-owners	Formal resolution within defined timeframe	MoPME; MoE; JRF

Note: Interface ownership and escalation arrangements apply once the NLIF is adopted as a governing framework.

5.5 Governing misalignment and deferral

When misalignment is identified across curriculum, assessment, supervision, deployment, data use, or digital systems, the NLIF is intended to require formal resolution rather than informal deferral. Responsible institutions must acknowledge the issue, specify corrective action, and act within defined timeframes.

Repeated deferral, unresolved disputes, or failure to respond activates escalation in accordance with Chapter 4.3 and Annex A (S-family). Persistent misalignment should be treated as a governance failure rather than a technical limitation.

5.6 Interface discipline and dispute resolution clock

To prevent coordination from becoming a mechanism for delay, the NLIF proposes time-bound expectations for resolving interface decisions that affect learning benchmarks. Disputes unresolved at directorate level escalate to division level within defined periods. Failure to resolve at division level is intended to trigger escalation to the relevant ministry with binding authority to decide. The dispute resolution clock is intended to convert coordination into time-bound decisions with an automatic escalation path.

Note that the NLIF does not propose to reassign statutory mandates or create parallel bodies; it operates through existing processes (see Chapter 1.3). Its role is explicit and limited: to ensure that where mandates interact, responsibility is clear, decisions are taken, and learning outcomes are not compromised by institutional fragmentation.

5.7 Implications for institutional coordination and accountability

By making institutional interfaces explicit and ownership enforceable, the NLIF limits deferral, prevents responsibility shifting, and protects learning improvement from dilution. It

strengthens existing institutions rather than bypassing them and ensures that authority is exercised in service of learning coherence rather than organisational convenience.

PART II: REFORM DOMAINS

Chapter 6. Foundational Learning and Early Grade Mastery

Why this domain matters

- Foundational learning is where system failure first becomes visible to children, families, and teachers.
- In Bangladesh, early learning failure is patterned and cumulative, driven by system conditions rather than effort.
- Weak early mastery forces later reforms into remediation and erodes trust, increasing reliance on private tutoring.
- This makes foundational learning the highest-leverage reform domain in the NLIF.

What must hold when foundational learning is working

- By the end of the early grades, most children read with fluency and understanding and demonstrate basic numeracy with automaticity.
- Learning accumulates across terms, with limited loss after school breaks.
- Instructional time is protected, pacing responds to learner understanding, and practice, explanation, and feedback are routine.
- Families understand learning expectations and trust school feedback.
- Headteachers actively protect early-grade routines and learning time.

Phase 1: Minimum practice expectations (raising the floor)

- Protected daily instructional time for Bangla and Mathematics.
- Individual or small-group reading practice, not dominant choral recitation.
- Daily oral language activities and early written responses beyond copying.
- Daily numeracy practice to build fluency and automaticity.
- Lesson pacing adjusted to observed understanding, not syllabus pressure.
- Limited reliance on copying from the board.
- Short, low-stakes diagnostic checks used to regroup or re-teach.
- Rapid in-class or near-class support when learners fall behind.
- Play- and language-rich pre-primary practice focused on readiness.
- Simple, consistent communication to families about what children are learning.

Phase 2: Convergence (raising the median)

- Reduced variation in early-grade learning outcomes across schools and upazilas.
- Early-grade pedagogy aligned around literacy and numeracy mastery.
- Teachers supported to address multiple learning levels within classrooms.
- Stronger alignment between pre-primary education and early learning standards.

Phase 3: Consolidation (raising the tail)

- Foundational learning embedded as the primary system objective across mandates.
- Early-grade instructional time protected through policy and enforcement.
- Persistent failure triggers escalation and accountability rather than tolerance.
- Downstream reforms constrained where foundational learning does not hold.

6.1 The problem: early learning failure as a system failure

This chapter sets out the foundational learning priorities, minimum practice expectations, and convergence directions proposed under the NLIF. These provisions apply once the Framework is adopted.

Foundational learning is where the education system first becomes real to children, families, and teachers. It is the point at which learners encounter formal instruction, teachers face the widest variation in readiness, and expectations about success or failure begin to form. When early learning works, later reforms build on a stable base. When it fails, every subsequent intervention is forced into remediation mode.

In Bangladesh, foundational learning failure is not episodic**.** It is patterned, cumulative, and predictable. Across the early grades, the system produces a recognisable set of outcomes:

- Children progress without secure decoding skills, reading fluency, or numeracy automaticity
- Comprehension gaps widen rapidly as texts become denser
- Learning decays across school breaks rather than accumulating over time
- Classroom time is dominated by copying and recitation rather than practice, explanation, and feedback
- Instruction advances to meet syllabus pressure even when mastery has not been achieved

Families respond rationally to this uncertainty. Many invest in private tutoring as a hedge against weak signals from school. Others disengage from school feedback altogether. Neither response reflects a lack of concern for learning; both reflect low confidence in the system's ability to deliver it. These outcomes are not primarily the result of teacher effort or student motivation. They are produced by system conditions, including:

- Overloaded curricula with unrealistic pacing expectations
- Weak guidance on how to adjust instruction based on learner understanding
- Unstable instructional time due to routine interruptions
- Limited use of low-stakes diagnostic feedback
- The absence of predictable, supportive structures for early-grade teaching

Because foundational learning failure often remains invisible in formal results until much later, it is tolerated, normalised, and quietly passed forward from grade to grade. For this reason, foundational learning is the highest-leverage reform domain in the NLIF. It is where improvement will become visible quickly, where confidence will be rebuilt, and where trust in the public education system will either be restored or lost.

6.2 North Star: what must hold when foundational learning is working

When foundational learning is working, a specific and observable set of conditions holds across the system. These conditions are not aspirational. They describe what must be true, simultaneously, if early learning improvement is to be credible and sustained.

By the end of Grade 3:

- Most children read fluently enough to access meaning, not merely decode words
- Learners can explain what they have read, orally and in writing, using age-appropriate language
- Basic numeracy is automatic, allowing attention to shift from calculation to problem-solving
- Learning accumulates across terms, with limited loss after school breaks

In early-grade classrooms:

- Instructional time is protected and predictable
- Teachers adjust pace based on what children can do, not on pressure to complete content
- Practice, explanation, and feedback is routine rather than exceptional
- Classrooms are calm, structured, and focused on learning rather than compliance

Early success should build confidence. Avoidance, silent disengagement, and fear-driven behaviours will decline rather than intensify over time.

Across the wider system:

- Families understand what children are expected to learn and how progress is judged
- Trust in school feedback increases, reducing reliance on private tutoring as a necessity
- Teachers feel supported rather than exposed by supervision and monitoring
- Headteachers actively protect early-grade learning time and routines as a core operational responsibility

This North Star defines the conditions that will have to hold if foundational learning is to improve at scale. It sets the benchmark against which Phase 1 practices, and later system convergence efforts, should be judged.

6.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (raising the floor)

Phase 1 does not aim to achieve universal mastery. It aims to establish the minimum conditions under which learning failure becomes visible, actionable, and correctable. At present, foundational learning failure persists because weak practice is normalised, instructional time is unstable, and evidence does not reliably trigger response. Phase 1 addresses this by defining what must now become *normal* in every early-grade classroom and school.

These expectations are deliberately concrete. They do not require new institutions, advanced capability, or complex accountability mechanisms. They require clarity, protection of time, and disciplined follow-through. If these practices are not in place, later reforms cannot compensate. Table 6.1 sets out the proposed minimum practice expectations that apply system-wide from Phase 1 onward.

These expectations define the *floor* for foundational learning. They make weak learning visible earlier, stabilise classroom routines, and reduce overload. Phase 1 success should be judged not by perfection, but by whether these practices are recognisable, widespread, and defensible as normal.

Table 6.1 Phase 1 proposed minimum practice expectations for foundational learning

Practice area	What must be normal in early grades	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Protected instructional time	Daily protected blocks for Bangla and Mathematics are delivered as scheduled, with interruptions actively minimised	Lost instructional time cannot be recovered later	Headteachers; Upazila offices
Early reading practice	Children read aloud individually or in small groups; choral recitation is not the dominant mode	Fluency and comprehension require individual practice	Teachers; instructional supervisors
Oral language	Daily read-alouds and structured student talk in early grades	Vocabulary and comprehension underpin later reading	Teachers; training institutes
Writing	Short written responses and explanations are introduced from Grade 2, not only copying	Writing reveals understanding beyond recall	Teachers
Numeracy fluency	Daily practice in basic operations precedes complex problem-solving	Automaticity reduces cognitive overload	Teachers
Lesson pacing	Teachers adjust pace based on observed understanding, not uniform syllabus progression	Prevents silent accumulation of learning gaps	Teachers; supervisors
Copying from the board	Board copying is limited in early grades in favour of interaction and practice	Copying masks non-learning	Headteachers
Diagnostic checks	Short, low-stakes checks are used to regroup or re-teach, not to rank	Learning must be visible to guide instruction	Teachers
Rapid remedial support	Temporary in-class or near-class support is provided when learners fall behind	Early acceleration is cheaper than later remediation	Schools; local offices
Pre-primary practice	PPE emphasises interaction, routines, and language-rich play rather than formal content	Readiness is built through practice, not formality	PPE teachers; supervisors
Family communication	Families receive simple messages about what children are learning and why	Trust reduces reliance on private tutoring	Schools

6.4 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation (raising the median and the tail)

Once minimum practice expectations are stabilised, the system can shift from visibility to consistency. Phase 2 and Phase 3 are not about adding new initiatives. They are about

converging routines, strengthening professional capability, and embedding early learning priorities structurally so that gains extend beyond early adopters and reach the hardest-to-serve learners.

Phase 2 is intended to focus on convergence across classrooms, schools, and upazilas. Phase 3 focuses on consolidation through accountability, mandate clarity, and institutional durability. Together, they move the system from partial improvement toward near-universal mastery.

Table 6.2 summarises the medium- and long-term convergence directions for foundational learning**,** drawing on existing consultation findings and sector analyses. These directions assume that Phase 1 practices are already in place.

Table 6.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for foundational learning and early grade mastery

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implementation implications
Early grade pedagogy	Redesign early-grade teaching practices to prioritise literacy and numeracy mastery over examination performance	Medium	Requires alignment between curriculum guidance, teacher training, and assessment expectations
Differentiated instruction	Enable teachers to address multiple learning levels within the same classroom	Medium	Requires targeted skill development and support for small-group instruction
Alignment of PPE to ELDS	Align PPE goals, standards, and monitoring tools with ELDS	Medium	Depends on cross-ministry coordination and revision of guidance and tools
PPE quality improvement	Strengthen PPE teacher preparation, materials, and routine coaching	Medium	Requires sustained coaching time and monitoring focused on practice, not paperwork
Child-centred PPE culture	Embed child-centred PPE as a system-wide mindset through supervision, incentives, and leadership signals	Long	Requires a shift from compliance-focused supervision to practice-focused support
System-wide learning priority	Institutionalise foundational learning as the primary system objective across mandates	Long	Requires mandate clarity, coordination rules, and escalation authority
Durable early-grade protection	Lock in protection of early-grade instructional time through policy and enforcement	Long	Requires accountability thresholds and consequences for erosion

These convergence directions do not replace the minimum practice expectations in Phase 1. They build on them. Phase 1 raises the floor. Phase 2 raises the median through consistency. Phase 3 raises the tail by ensuring that persistent failure triggers response rather than tolerance. How these expectations are monitored, escalated, and enforced is set out in Part III of the Framework.

6.5 System responsibility: who must hold the line

Foundational learning cannot be delivered by teachers alone. Responsibility is distributed across system levels. Phase 1 establishes minimum classroom practice, but whether those practices hold depends on decisions taken above the classroom. System responsibility at this stage is primarily about protection, restraint, and support, not innovation.

At the school level, headteachers will be responsible for protecting early-grade instructional time, stabilising daily routines, and ensuring that classroom practice aligns with minimum expectations. This is an operational duty, not a discretionary leadership preference.

At the local level, upazila and district offices will be responsible for reducing routine interruptions, aligning supervision with instructional support, and ensuring that early-grade classrooms are not overloaded by reporting, events, or parallel initiatives. Where foundational learning time is repeatedly eroded, local offices are responsible for corrective action.

At the central level, curriculum, assessment, and training authorities will be responsible for ensuring that expectations placed on early-grade teachers are realistic and coherent. This includes resisting curriculum expansion without subtraction, avoiding assessment practices that distort early learning priorities, and aligning teacher preparation with actual classroom practice rather than formal compliance.

Across all levels, the system will stop treating early-grade learning as a temporary focus area or a programme under the proposed NLIF. It must be held as a non-negotiable system condition. Where this does not occur, Phase 2 and Phase 3 reforms cannot succeed.

6.6 Linking forward: from minimum practice to system enforcement

This chapter defines what foundational learning must look like when the system is functioning and what must become normal in classrooms under Phase 1. It also sets the direction for how early learning gains are consolidated through Phase 2 and Phase 3.

What this chapter does *not* do is specify monitoring tools, escalation thresholds, or enforcement mechanisms. Those are addressed deliberately in Part III of this document.

Part III sets out:

- how minimum practice expectations are monitored without increasing burden,
- how persistent failure triggers response rather than tolerance,
- how authority is exercised when instructional time is repeatedly eroded,
- and how accountability is activated only after support has been provided.

Foundational learning is where the credibility of the NLIF will first be tested once adopted. Visible improvement here will signal that the system can change behaviour, not just language. Failure to hold the line at this stage will undermine confidence in every reform domain that follows.

Chapter 7. Instructional time protection and school operations

Why this domain matters

- Instructional time is the primary resource through which learning occurs. When time is unstable, curriculum quality, teacher effort, and assessment reform cannot deliver results.
- Time loss is patterned and system-produced: interruptions, administrative tasks during the school day, external visits, and diversion of teachers to non-instructional duties.
- When time is eroded, teachers rush, reduce practice and feedback, and default to copying or recitation to maintain pace. Families respond rationally by seeking private tutoring or supervision.
- Time loss is rarely captured in formal indicators, so it is tolerated and passed forward.

What must hold when instructional time is protected

- Scheduled instructional minutes are delivered as planned across the school year, with routines that are stable and widely understood.
- Lessons start on time and are not routinely interrupted. Lost time is identified and recovered rather than absorbed.
- Administrative demands do not displace teaching by default, and school leaders have authority to protect schedules.
- Supervision reinforces delivered instruction rather than undermining it, and variability in delivered time across schools declines.

Phase 1: minimum operational expectations

- Teaching time delivered as scheduled, with deviations requiring explanation and recovery.
- Start times and lesson blocks enforced so that school days begin on time.
- Teachers protected from routine diversion to non-teaching duties.
- Reporting, visits, and events scheduled so they do not displace core instructional blocks.
- Lost instructional time explicitly identified and recovered.
- Supervisory checks focused on delivered instruction, not only presence or paperwork.
- Basic continuity plans in place to maintain instruction during disruptions.

Phase 2: convergence

- Supervision shifts from inspection to protection of instructional time, with revised tools and training.
- Reporting and data requests consolidated and streamlined through burden audits and cross-unit coordination.
- School calendar rules permit local flexibility while preserving total instructional hours.
- Non-teaching services delivered without diverting teaching personnel.

Phase 3: consolidation

- System protocols prioritise instructional continuity and recovery after shocks.
- Enforcement thresholds trigger review and corrective action when time loss persists beyond defined limits.
- Instructional time protection becomes a defended system norm, not an individual school effort.

7.1 The problem: instructional time loss as a system failure

Instructional time is the primary resource through which learning occurs. This chapter sets out the expectations, protections, and governance arrangements for instructional time proposed under the NLIF. These provisions apply once the Framework is adopted.

When time is unstable, fragmented, or routinely displaced, learning outcomes deteriorate regardless of curriculum quality, teacher effort, or assessment reform. Across the schooling system, instructional time loss is not random. It follows predictable patterns shaped by governance arrangements, administrative practices, and weak operational discipline.

In many schools, scheduled teaching minutes are eroded through late starts, unplanned interruptions, administrative tasks imposed during the school day, external visits that displace lessons, and the routine diversion of teachers to non-instructional duties. These losses accumulate gradually. Individually, each interruption appears minor or justified. Collectively, they represent a substantial reduction in learning opportunity over the school year.

The consequences are visible in classrooms. Teachers rush lessons to compensate for lost time, reduce opportunities for practice and feedback, and rely on copying or recitation to maintain pace. Learners experience fragmented instruction and unstable routines, making sustained engagement difficult. Over time, instructional drift becomes normalised. Time loss is tolerated rather than corrected, and responsibility for recovery is diffuse.

Families respond rationally to this uncertainty. When school time does not reliably translate into learning, families seek alternatives, including private tutoring or additional supervision at home. This response reflects not disengagement, but low confidence in the system's ability to protect learning time.

Importantly, instructional time loss is not primarily the result of individual school leadership failure. It is produced by system-level behaviours, including:

- Administrative and reporting requirements imposed without regard to instructional schedules
- Weak enforcement of start times, lesson blocks, and recovery expectations
- Limited authority at school level to refuse non-teaching demands
- Fragmented supervision that prioritises presence or compliance over delivered instruction
- Insufficient operational planning for disruptions, emergencies, and shocks

Because time loss is rarely captured in formal indicators, it remains largely invisible in accountability systems. As a result, it persists across grades, schools, and sub-sectors.

Protecting instructional time is therefore a foundational operational reform. Without it, improvements in curriculum, teaching, or assessment cannot be sustained.

7.2 North Star: what must hold when instructional time is protected

When instructional time is effectively protected, a specific and observable set of conditions holds across the schooling system. These conditions are not aspirational. They describe what must be true if learning reforms are to function as intended.

Delivered time and routines

- Scheduled instructional minutes are delivered as planned across the school year
- Daily and weekly routines are stable, predictable, and widely understood
- Lessons start on time and are not routinely interrupted

Operational discipline

- Non-instructional demands do not displace teaching by default
- Administrative tasks are scheduled outside core instructional blocks
- Lost instructional time is explicitly identified and recovered

Professional confidence

- Teachers can plan lessons with confidence that allocated time will be available
- School leaders have clear authority to protect instructional schedules
- Supervision reinforces time protection rather than undermining it

System trust

- Families can trust that time spent in school represents real learning opportunity
- Variability in delivered instructional time across schools is reduced
- Instructional time becomes a defended system norm rather than an individual effort

This North Star defines the operational conditions required for learning improvement at scale. It sets the benchmark against which Phase 1 expectations and later convergence efforts should be judged.

7.3 Phase 1: minimum operational expectations

Phase 1 does not aim to optimise school operations or eliminate all sources of disruption. Its purpose is to establish the minimum conditions under which instructional time loss becomes visible, actionable, and correctable. At present, time erosion persists because weak protection is normalised and responsibility is unclear. Phase 1 addresses this by defining what must become normal practice across all schools. These expectations describe what becomes normal practice once the NLIF is adopted and Phase 1 governance controls are in force.

These expectations are deliberately concrete. They do not require new institutions or complex accountability mechanisms. They require clarity, authority, and disciplined follow-through. If these minimum conditions are not in place, later reforms cannot compensate. Table 7.1 sets out the minimum operational expectations that apply system-wide from Phase 1 onward.

Table 7.1 Proposed Phase 1 minimum operational expectations for instructional time protection

Operational area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Scheduled instructional minutes	Teaching time is delivered as scheduled; deviations require explanation and recovery	Lost time compounds learning loss	School leadership; system supervisors
Start times and lesson blocks	School days and lesson blocks start on time	Predictability enables effective teaching	School leadership
Protection from non-teaching duties	Teachers are not routinely diverted from instruction	Teaching time cannot be recovered later	System authorities
Administrative activities	Reporting, visits, and events do not displace core instructional time	Compliance crowds out learning	Line directorates
Disruption recovery	Lost instructional time is explicitly identified and recovered	Prevents silent erosion	Schools; supervisors
Supervision focus	Supervisory visits check delivered instruction, not only presence	Visibility drives correction	Supervisory units
Continuity planning	Schools maintain basic plans for maintaining instruction during disruptions	Protects learning during shocks	System planners; schools

These expectations define the operational floor. Phase 1 success should be judged not by perfection, but by whether these practices are recognisable, widespread, and defensible as normal across the system.

7.4 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation (raising the median and protecting the tail)

Once minimum operational expectations are stabilised under Phase 1, the system can shift from visibility to consistency and durability. Phase 2 and Phase 3 are not about introducing new initiatives. They are about aligning behaviours, strengthening enforcement, and embedding instructional time protection structurally so that gains extend beyond early adopters and persist under pressure.

Phase 2 focuses on convergence across schools, regions, and sub-sectors. Phase 3 focuses on consolidation through clear mandates, escalation thresholds, and institutional durability. Together, they move the system from partial compliance toward sustained protection of instructional time. Table 7.2 summarises the medium- and long-term convergence directions for instructional time protection.

These convergence directions do not replace Phase 1 expectations. They build on them. Phase 1 raises the floor by making time protection visible and normal. Phase 2 raises the median by aligning practice across the system. Phase 3 protects the tail by ensuring persistent time loss triggers response rather than tolerance.

Table 7.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for instructional time protection and school operations

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implementation implications
Supervision practice	Shift supervision from inspection to protection of instructional time	Medium	Requires revised tools and supervisor training
Administrative burden	Consolidate and streamline reporting and data requests	Medium	Requires cross-unit coordination and burden audits
School calendars	Allow local flexibility while preserving total instructional hours	Medium	Requires clear rules and communication
Non-teaching services	Deliver programmes without diverting teaching personnel	Medium	Requires operational staffing arrangements
Emergency response	Prioritise instructional continuity and recovery after disruptions	Long	Requires system-level protocols
Enforcement thresholds	Trigger review when time loss persists beyond defined limits	Long	Requires escalation authority and follow-up

7.5 Monitoring, escalation, and system responsibility

Instructional time protection cannot be carried by schools alone. Many sources of time loss originate above the school level. Effective monitoring must therefore track delivered instructional time, not only scheduled time, and attribute responsibility accurately.

Where persistent shortfalls occur, escalation must be timely and corrective rather than punitive. The objective is to restore instructional time, not to assign blame. Clear ownership at each system level is essential so that schools are supported, not exposed, when protecting learning time.

The mechanisms through which monitoring, escalation, and enforcement operate are set out in Part III of the Framework.

7.6 Link forward

Protecting instructional time establishes the operational foundation for all subsequent reforms. Without stable time and routines, improvements in teaching quality, curriculum coherence, assessment integrity, and equity cannot be sustained.

This chapter applies across the entire schooling system once the proposed NLIF is adopted. It creates the conditions under which the reforms set out in Chapters 8 through 10 can take hold and deliver lasting improvement.

Chapter 8. Teachers and Professional Culture

Why this domain matters

- Professional practice is constrained and shaped by system conditions that both block committed teachers and protect weak practice.
- Absenteeism and late arrival are tolerated in thin staffing contexts; redeployments and non-teaching duties disrupt continuity and dilute accountability for learning.
- Supervision often prioritises compliance and documentation rather than instruction and student understanding.
- Professional development is episodic and detached from classroom practice, allowing routines to remain unchanged.

What must hold when professional culture is functioning

- Teachers would be present, punctual, and consistently assigned to classrooms, with stability in early grades and critical subjects.
- Workloads and class sizes will allow feedback, diagnosis, and follow-up with struggling learners.
- Observation would routine and instruction-focused, with specific feedback linked to what is seen in classrooms.
- Teachers would be able to surface instructional challenges safely, and professional expectations are defined by learning and practice, not paperwork.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Daily teacher attendance and punctuality would be monitored and acted upon.
- Posting stability would be expected so teachers remain assigned to classes across the academic year.
- Vacancies and prolonged overload would be treated as operational risks requiring response, not tolerated norms.
- Regular classroom observation would be focused on instruction and student learning.
- Feedback quality would be strengthened through specific, timely guidance linked to observed practice.
- Supervision would be oriented to coaching and instructional support rather than inspection alone.
- Reporting restraint would apply so non-essential reporting does not displace instruction.
- Safe issue reporting would be enabled so teachers can flag learning challenges without penalty.
- Teachers would be protected from routine non-teaching duties that displace instruction.

Phase 2: convergence

- Headteacher instructional leadership would be strengthened and linked to classroom practice.
- Coaching and mentoring coverage would be expanded and made routine across schools.
- Professional development would be aligned to observed classroom needs, with follow-up embedded in school routines.
- Supervision quality would become more consistent across location and school type.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Deployment discipline and vacancy resolution routines strengthened for continuity.
- Career progression and standards linked credibly to professional competence once expectations and support are established.
- Persistent weak practice no longer persists by default after support has been provided.

8.1 The problem: professional practice constrained and protected by system conditions

Teacher practice in Bangladesh has been shaped by long-standing system conditions that simultaneously constrain committed teachers and protect weak practice. Chronic vacancies, high instructional loads, unstable postings, and uneven supervision quality have produced a professional environment in which instructional responsibility is diffuse and learning outcomes are weakly enforced.

These conditions operate across government, MPO, and non-government schools, albeit through different governance and employment arrangements. While authority over appointment, pay, and discipline varies, instructional expectations are shaped by common curriculum mandates, public financing conditions, assessment regimes, and social expectations. As a result, professional practice is affected by system-wide signals rather than institutional type alone.

In many schools, absenteeism and late arrival are tolerated because coverage is prioritised over instructional quality in contexts where staffing is thin and substitutes are unavailable. Teachers are frequently redeployed, transferred, or assigned non-teaching duties, disrupting continuity and weakening accountability for learning progress. Large class sizes and excessive teaching loads further reduce the feasibility of individual feedback, diagnostic attention, and follow-up with struggling learners.

Supervision has often reinforced these dynamics. Observation and monitoring frequently prioritise documentation, attendance registers, and procedural compliance rather than classroom practice, instructional decision-making, or student understanding. Where supervision does not engage with learning, professional judgement is neither required nor developed.

At the same time, professional development has remained largely episodic and detached from daily teaching. Training is commonly delivered away from classrooms, with limited follow-up and weak linkage to observed practice or student learning. Participation substitutes for improvement, certification substitutes for capability, and classroom routines remain largely unchanged.

These conditions do not merely demotivate capable teachers. They also allow weak instructional practice to persist with little consequence. Where expectations are unclear, workloads are excessive, staffing is unstable, and supervision does not engage with learning, professional responsibility is diluted and unevenly exercised.

This chapter addresses teachers and professional culture as a system domain. Its focus is not on individual effort or blame, but on the conditions under which professional responsibility becomes visible, supported, and enforceable in a system facing real workforce and operational constraints.

8.2 North Star: what must hold when professional culture is functioning

When the professional culture of teaching is functioning, a clear and observable set of conditions will hold across the system. These conditions are not aspirational. They describe what must be true if instructional improvement is to be credible and sustained at scale.

Professional presence and stability

- Teachers are present, on time, and consistently assigned to classrooms.
- Early-grade and critical subject postings are stable across the academic year.
- Vacancies, prolonged absences, and overload situations are addressed promptly rather than normalised.

Workable professional conditions

- Staffing levels and class sizes allow teachers to maintain instructional responsibility for their students.
- Teaching loads permit observation of learning, feedback, and follow-up.
- Employment and posting arrangements support continuity rather than churn.

Instruction-focused supervision and support

- Classroom observation is routine and focused on teaching practice and student learning.
- Feedback is specific, timely, and linked to observed instruction.
- Coaching and mentoring are embedded in school routines rather than delivered as stand-alone events.

Safe professional engagement

- Teachers can report instructional challenges, learning gaps, and resource constraints without fear of reprisal.
- Supervision distinguishes clearly between support processes and disciplinary procedures.

- Professional dialogue is oriented toward improvement rather than fault avoidance.

Credible professional expectations

- Teachers understand what constitutes acceptable instructional practice.
- Mechanical compliance without engagement in learning is no longer sufficient.
- Professional responsibility is defined by classroom practice and student learning, not paperwork alone.

This North Star defines the benchmark against which minimum practice expectations and later system convergence should be judged.

8.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (establishing credible professionalism)

Phase 1 does not aim to resolve all issues related to teacher supply, pre-service preparation, remuneration, or long-term career structures. Its purpose is to establish the minimum conditions under which professional practice becomes visible, supported, and accountable within existing constraints.

At present, weak professional culture persists because presence is uneven, workloads are often excessive, observation is shallow, and feedback rarely triggers response. Phase 1 addresses this by defining what must become normal in every school, regardless of management type.

Phase 1 expectations assume that staffing and workload conditions make regular presence, observation, and feedback feasible. Where chronic vacancies or extreme overload persist, these conditions must be addressed in parallel by the system, as professional accountability cannot operate in their absence. Table 8.1 sets out the minimum practice expectations that apply system-wide from Phase 1 onward.

Table 8.1 Proposed Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for teachers and professional culture

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Teacher presence	Daily teacher attendance and punctuality monitored and acted upon	Instruction cannot improve without consistent presence	Headteachers; local offices
Posting stability	Teachers remain assigned to their classes for the full academic year	Learning accountability requires continuity	Deployment authorities
Staffing adequacy	Vacancies and prolonged overload treated as operational risks, not tolerated norms	Professional expectations require feasible workloads	Central and local authorities
Classroom observation	Each teacher observed regularly with focus on instruction	Practice must be visible to improve	Headteachers; supervisors
Feedback quality	Feedback linked to observed teaching and learning evidence	Non-specific feedback does not change practice	Supervisors

Coaching orientation	Supervision prioritises instructional support over inspection	Compliance alone does not improve learning	Supervisory cadres
Reporting restraint	Non-essential reporting reduced during instructional hours	Administrative overload displaces teaching	Local and central offices
Safe issue reporting	Teachers can flag learning challenges without penalty	Fear suppresses problem-solving	School leadership
Non-teaching duties	Teachers protected from routine non-instructional assignments	Instructional focus must be defended	School and local leadership

These expectations define the professional floor. Phase 1 success should be judged by whether these practices are recognisable, widespread, and treated as normal, not by whether professional culture has fully transformed.

8.4 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation of professional practice

Once minimum professional practices are stabilised, the system can shift from visibility to consistency. Phase 2 and Phase 3 focus on strengthening capability, reducing variation, and embedding professional responsibility so that instructional quality does not depend on individual discretion or favourable circumstances.

Phase 2 emphasises convergence: improving the consistency of supervision, expanding coaching coverage, aligning professional development with classroom needs, and reducing disparities driven by location, management type, or staffing patterns. Phase 3 focuses on consolidation: embedding expectations into deployment, progression, and accountability arrangements so that weak practice no longer persists by default once support has been provided. Table 8.2 summarises the medium- and long-term convergence directions for teachers and professional culture. These directions assume that Phase 1 expectations are already in place.

Table 8.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for teachers and professional culture

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implementation implications
Instructional leadership	Strengthen headteacher capacity to lead teaching and learning	Medium	Requires leadership development linked to classroom practice
Coaching coverage	Expand routine coaching and mentoring across schools	Medium	Requires supervisor time reallocation and skill development
Professional development	Align CPD with observed classroom needs	Medium	Requires repurposing training institutions toward practice
Deployment discipline	Enforce stable postings and timely vacancy resolution	Medium–Long	Requires HR coordination and transparent rules
Career pathways	Clarify progression linked to professional competence	Long	Requires regulatory alignment and credible evaluation

Professional standards	Apply standards consistently once expectations are clear	Long	Requires enforcement after support has been provided

These convergence directions do not replace Phase 1 expectations. They build on them. Phase 1 establishes credibility. Phase 2 reduces variation. Phase 3 ensures durability.

8.5 System responsibility: who must enable professional culture

Professional culture cannot be sustained by teachers alone. Whether minimum practices hold depends on decisions taken above the classroom.

At the school level, headteachers will be responsible for ensuring teacher presence, stabilising assignments, conducting instructional observation, protecting instructional time, and creating a safe environment for professional dialogue. These are operational responsibilities, not discretionary leadership styles.

At the local level, supervisory and administrative offices will be responsible for resolving vacancies, managing deployment, aligning supervision with instructional support, and reducing administrative burdens that displace teaching. Where absenteeism, instability, or excessive workload persist, corrective action is required.

At the central level, authorities responsible for recruitment, training, financing, and deployment will ensure that expectations placed on teachers are coherent and realistic. This includes addressing staffing adequacy, aligning professional development with classroom practice, and avoiding policy changes that undermine continuity or overload schools.

Across all levels, the system must stop treating professional culture as a by-product of reform. It must be held as a core condition for learning improvement. Where workforce constraints undermine professional expectations, responsibility lies with the system to correct those conditions rather than to dilute standards or displace accountability onto individual teachers.

8.6 Linking forward: from professional norms to enforceable accountability

This chapter defines what professional culture must look like when the system is functioning and what must become normal during Phase 1. It also sets the direction for how professional responsibility is strengthened through Phase 2 and Phase 3.

What this chapter does not specify are the monitoring instruments, escalation thresholds, or enforcement mechanisms that apply when professional expectations are persistently unmet. These are addressed in Part III of this document.

Part III sets out:

- how professional practice is monitored without increasing fear or burden,
- how support is provided before accountability is activated,
- how persistent non-compliance triggers response rather than tolerance,
- and how authority is exercised once expectations are clear and support has been offered.

Professional culture is a critical test of the NLIF. If instructional responsibility becomes visible, supported, and enforceable, the system can move from managing appearances to improving learning. If it does not, coherence elsewhere will not hold.

Chapter 9. Curriculum and Materials Coherence

Why this domain matters

- Curriculum incoherence is a system condition that makes superficial coverage, rote delivery, and reliance on external guides rational for teachers.
- Content expansion has outpaced instructional time; politicised insertions and parallel priorities crowd syllabi without subtraction.
- Curriculum, textbooks, teacher guidance, and examinations are revised through disconnected processes, producing misalignment and distortion.
- Without discipline, teachers and schools are forced into informal prioritisation, which is neither realistic nor fair.

What must hold when curriculum coherence is functioning

- Scope would fit available instructional time at each grade, with essential competencies explicitly prioritised and non-essential content removed or deferred.
- Vertical progression across grades would be clear and cumulative.
- Textbooks and supplementary materials would reflect curriculum priorities rather than expanding them.
- Examinations would assess stated objectives rather than redefining learning through test signals.
- Curriculum decisions would be stable enough to reduce reform fatigue and defensive practice.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (under the proposed NLIF)

- Scope–time checks would be required for all curriculum revisions, mapping learning expectations against instructional minutes.
- Addition freeze: no new content would be introduced without approved subtraction.
- Alignment visibility: curriculum, textbook, and assessment links would be documented before rollout.
- Textbook discipline would ensure materials do not expand content beyond curriculum intent.
- Supplementary materials would be controlled through approved lists explicitly linked to curriculum priorities.
- Examination blueprints would be mapped to curriculum objectives so exams do not redefine learning.
- Implementation restraint: no parallel directives would be issued during rollout periods.
- Coherence gates would be applied before any revision or rollout proceeds, with incomplete evidence triggering timeline extension rather than compression.

Phase 2: convergence

- Content consolidation would reduce breadth and prioritise depth across compulsory schooling.
- Vertical continuity would be strengthened across grades, with improved progression and reduced discontinuities.
- Materials quality routines would be institutionalised, including classroom feedback on textbook and supplementary resource use.
- Pedagogical guidance would be embedded within curriculum documents and aligned with training institutions.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Examination alignment would be locked to curriculum priorities through enforceable standards and moderation routines.
- Alignment gates would become durable stop-checks that prevent rollout without demonstrated coherence.
- Curriculum coherence would survive leadership changes and political pressure through mandated routines and coordination.

9.1 The problem: curriculum incoherence as a system condition

Curriculum incoherence in Bangladesh is not primarily a classroom failure. It is the result of long-standing system conditions that have made superficial coverage, rote delivery, and reliance on external materials rational responses for teachers and schools.

Across primary, secondary, madrasah, and vocational streams, curricula have become progressively overloaded, with content expansion outpacing available instructional time. Politicised insertions, parallel priorities, and episodic thematic additions have crowded syllabi without corresponding subtraction or re-sequencing. As a result, scope–time mismatch has become structural rather than incidental.

These pressures are compounded by weak alignment across institutions. Curriculum frameworks, textbooks, teacher guidance, and public examinations are developed and revised through partially disconnected processes involving the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), examination boards, training institutions, and sectoral directorates. Curriculum intent is frequently diluted or distorted during implementation, not through resistance, but through fragmentation and misaligned incentives.

Field-level implementation capacity further constrains coherence. Directorates responsible for dissemination and monitoring, including DPE and DSHE, operate with limited technical and human resources relative to the scale of the system. Monitoring therefore tends to prioritise distribution, compliance, and coverage rather than fidelity to curriculum priorities or depth of learning. In this context, guidebooks, private tutoring, and examination-oriented shortcuts proliferate as risk-management strategies rather than pedagogical choices.

Curriculum incoherence is therefore sustained by system design. Expecting teachers, headteachers, or field officers to compensate through individual judgement or informal prioritisation is neither realistic nor fair. This chapter treats curriculum and materials coherence

as a system responsibility, requiring restraint, coordination, and enforceable prioritisation rather than further activity.

9.1.1 Curriculum overload is not a function of subject count

In the early grades, curriculum overload is often misinterpreted as a problem of having "too many subjects." In practice, overload persists even where the formal subject count is limited, as in Grades 1–3 where Bangla, Mathematics, and English dominate the timetable.

Overload arises instead from a mismatch between expected learning outcomes, available instructional time, pacing assumptions embedded in curriculum documents and textbooks, and assessment signals that prioritise coverage over mastery. When curriculum design assumes uninterrupted instructional blocks, uniform progression, and immediate mastery, even a small number of subjects becomes unteachable under real school conditions characterised by time loss, varied learner readiness, and uneven support.

Curriculum coherence must therefore be understood not as simplification through subject reduction alone, but as disciplined alignment between learning expectations, instructional time, materials, and assessment. Without this alignment, early-grade curriculum pressure manifests as rushed instruction, copying, recitation, and reliance on external guides—outcomes already documented in Chapter 6.

9.2 North Star: what must hold when curriculum coherence is functioning

When curriculum coherence is functioning, a specific and observable set of conditions holds across the system. These conditions are not aspirational. They define what must be true if curriculum reform is to support learning rather than overwhelm it.

Feasible scope and sequencing

- Curriculum content fits available instructional time at each grade, explicitly assuming protected instructional time as defined in Chapter 7.
- Essential competencies are explicitly prioritised, with non-essential content removed or deferred.
- Vertical progression across grades is clear, cumulative, and defensible.

Alignment across curriculum, materials, and assessment

- Textbooks, teacher guides, and supplementary materials reflect curriculum priorities rather than expanding them.
- Public examinations assess stated curriculum objectives rather than redefining them.
- Assessment signals reinforce depth, mastery, and understanding, not recall alone.

Clarity for implementers

- Teachers and schools understand what must be taught, in what order, and to what level of mastery.
- Field officers are not required to interpret competing directives or reconcile contradictory signals.

- Curriculum decisions are stable over time, reducing reform fatigue and defensive practice.

This North Star sets the benchmark against which minimum practice expectations and later system convergence must be judged.

9.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (establishing curriculum discipline)

Phase 1 does not aim to resolve all curriculum quality or relevance issues. Its purpose is to restore discipline to the curriculum system by making overload visible, preventing further erosion, and protecting implementers from impossible demands.

At present, curriculum failure persists not because priorities are unknown, but because additions are rarely blocked, sequencing is weakly enforced, and misalignment carries few consequences. Phase 1 addresses this by defining what must become normal once the NLIF is adopted. Critically, Phase 1 is a restraint phase. It is designed to reduce noise, not to increase monitoring or activity. Without this restraint, later convergence efforts cannot succeed.

Table 9.1 Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for curriculum and materials coherence

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Scope–time checks	All curriculum revisions explicitly assess scope against available instructional time	Overload undermines mastery and credibility	NCTB
Addition freeze	No new content introduced without approved subtraction	Prevents cumulative overload	NCTB; MoPME; MoE
Alignment visibility	Curriculum, textbook, and assessment links documented before rollout	Reduces downstream distortion	NCTB; Examination boards
Textbook discipline	Textbooks reflect curriculum priorities without expansion	Materials shape classroom reality	NCTB
Supplementary materials control	Approved SRM lists explicitly linked to curriculum intent	Prevents parallel curricula	NCTB; Directorates
Examination alignment	Examination blueprints mapped to curriculum objectives	Exams must not redefine learning	BISE; BMEB; BTEB
Implementation restraint	No parallel directives issued during rollout periods	Reduces cognitive overload	MoPME; MoE

Phase 1 success should be judged by whether curriculum discipline is observable and defensible, not by whether coherence has been perfected.

Where scope–time mismatch, misaligned materials, or examination drift persist beyond an agreed review cycle, the response must be corrective rather than adaptive at classroom level. This may include pausing rollouts, revising assessment instruments, withdrawing

supplementary materials, or reissuing clarified guidance. The burden of adjustment must not fall on teachers or schools through informal prioritisation.

9.3.1 Curriculum coherence gates: how revisions must move through the system

To operationalise discipline, curriculum and materials changes must pass through explicit coherence gates before approval and rollout.

Table 9.2 Proposed curriculum coherence gates for revisions and rollouts under Phase 1

Gate	Required evidence before approval	Primary authority
Scope–time feasibility	Grade-level instructional minutes mapped against required competencies	NCTB
Subtraction rule	Explicit list of content removed or deferred	NCTB; MoPME; MoE
Vertical continuity	Confirmation of cumulative progression across grades	NCTB
Materials traceability	Textbook and teacher guide content mapped to curriculum objectives	NCTB
Assessment alignment	Examination blueprint mapped to stated objectives	Examination boards
Instructional impact check	Confirmation that protected instructional time assumptions hold	DPE; DSHE
Rollout restraint	Confirmation that no parallel circulars or directives will be issued	MoPME; MoE

Under the proposed NLIF, curriculum revisions, textbook changes, or materials rollouts would be expected to proceed only after coherence gates are satisfied. Where evidence is incomplete, revision timelines must be extended rather than expectations compressed. These shifts risk away from classrooms and onto the system, where it belongs.

9.4 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation of curriculum coherence

Once minimum discipline is established, the system can shift from containment to consistency. Phase 2 and Phase 3 focus on reducing variation, strengthening institutional routines, and embedding coherence so that it survives leadership changes and political pressure.

Phase 2 emphasises convergence across grades, streams, and materials. Phase 3 focuses on consolidation through enforceable gates and durable coordination mechanisms. Neither phase is viable unless Phase 1 discipline is already holding.

These phases assume progressive strengthening of technical and coordination capacity within NCTB, examination boards, and sectoral directorates. Without such strengthening, convergence cannot be sustained regardless of policy intent.

Table 9.3 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for curriculum and materials coherence

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implementation implications
Content consolidation	Reduce breadth and prioritise depth across compulsory schooling	Medium	Requires coordinated revision cycles
Vertical continuity	Ensure seamless progression to Grade 10; delay streaming	Medium	Requires cross-grade alignment
Materials quality routines	Institutionalise review of textbooks and SRM use	Medium	Requires feedback from classrooms
Pedagogy alignment	Embed pedagogical guidance within curriculum documents	Medium	Requires coordination with training
Assessment coherence	Lock examination alignment to curriculum priorities	Long	Requires enforcement authority
Alignment gates	Prevent rollout without demonstrated coherence	Long	Requires political and institutional backing

These convergence directions do not replace Phase 1 discipline. They depend on it.

9.5 System responsibility: who must hold the line on coherence

Curriculum coherence cannot be delivered by teachers or schools alone. Whether expectations hold depends on disciplined action by institutions with formal authority. Under the proposed NLIF,

- **NCTB** is responsible for curriculum frameworks, textbooks, and materials discipline, including enforcing subtraction and preventing expansion through materials.
- **Examination boards** are responsible for aligning assessment design with curriculum intent and resisting pressure to redefine learning through examinations.
- **DPE and DSHE** are responsible for disciplined dissemination and for avoiding parallel instructions that undermine coherence.
- **MoPME and MoE** are responsible for mandate clarity, coordination across bodies, and political restraint when new priorities arise.

Across all levels, the system must stop treating curriculum coherence as a technical exercise or a revision event. It must be held as a core system condition. Where coherence is not defended, learning improvement elsewhere will not hold.

9.6 Linking forward: from curriculum discipline to system credibility

This chapter defines what curriculum coherence must look like when the system is functioning and what must become normal during Phase 1. It also sets the direction for how coherence is consolidated through Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Curriculum coherence is a credibility test. If the system cannot restrain itself, protect implementers, and align its own institutions, no amount of pedagogical, operational, or professional reform will succeed. Holding the line here is therefore not a technical choice. It is a governing one.

Chapter 10. Assessment, Trust, and Result Integrity

Why this domain matters

- Assessment distortion is a system condition driven by high-stakes uses of results, unstable formats, weak moderation, and blurred purposes.
- When too much depends on single scores, distortion becomes rational: teaching narrows, memorisation substitutes for understanding, and private tutoring expands.
- Distorted signals obscure learning failure rather than revealing it, and uncomfortable evidence does not reliably trigger corrective response.
- Trust collapses when results are overloaded, volatile, or interpreted as control rather than learning.

What must hold when assessment signals are credible

- Classroom assessment would prioritise diagnosis, feedback, and instructional adjustment, especially in early grades.
- Assessment formats and standards would be predictable over time, with clear purpose and communication.
- Independent learning assessment would be treated as legitimate system diagnostic evidence.
- Integrity would be protected through separation of functions, moderation norms, and reduced penalty for honest reporting of poor results.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Routine low-stakes learning checks would be introduced in early grades for Bangla and Mathematics.
- Formative assessment would be emphasised in early grades to prevent silent early failure.
- Feedback would be provided quickly enough to influence learning.
- Assessment formats would remain stable within cycles to reduce anxiety, gaming, and volatility.
- Transparency rules would clarify assessment purpose and use to families and schools.
- Learning assessment would be separated from punitive control so honest reporting is protected.
- Public examination restraint would apply, with no new high-stakes uses added.

Phase 2: convergence

- Clearer balance between formative and summative functions, aligned across levels.
- Moderation and standard-setting routines institutionalised across boards.
- Independent, periodic sample-based learning assessment embedded as a routine diagnostic input.
- Incentives linked to single scores reduced to lower distortion.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Integrity enforcement for repeated breaches of assessment rules, with clear authority and follow-up.
- Data credibility protected through auditability and institutional safeguards, so system learning is disciplined rather than performative.
- Results are used to trigger support and correction rather than reassurance or blame.

10.1 The problem: distorted assessment signals as a system condition

Assessment distortion in Bangladesh is not primarily a problem of examination design, teacher ethics, or student behaviour. It is a system condition produced by the interaction of high-stakes uses of results, unstable formats, weak moderation, and limited separation between assessment for learning and assessment for control.

Across primary and secondary education, assessment results generated through school-based assessments, public examinations administered by the Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board (BMEB), and the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), as well as independent assessments coordinated through BANBEIS, are asked to serve multiple and often conflicting purposes. These include certification, progression, scholarship allocation, school comparison, and public reassurance.

When too much depends on a single score or examination cycle, distortion becomes rational. Teaching narrows to rehearsed formats. Memorisation substitutes for understanding. Private tutoring expands as households hedge against uncertainty. Anxiety increases for students and families, while teachers face pressure to produce results rather than evidence of learning.

At the system level, distorted signals obscure learning failure rather than reveal it. Independent learning assessments conducted through the National Student Assessment (NSA) and related instruments have repeatedly demonstrated large gaps between examination performance and actual competencies, particularly in Bangla and mathematics. However, these findings are weakly integrated into decision-making by MoPME, MoE, DPE, and DSHE, and rarely trigger corrective action across curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment practice.

Assessment distortion therefore persists not because learning is unmeasured, but because the system does not protect the integrity, interpretation, or use of its own evidence. This chapter treats assessment, trust, and result integrity as a system responsibility.

10.2 North Star: what must hold when assessment signals are credible

When assessment systems are functioning, a clear and observable set of conditions holds across institutions and levels.

Assessment supports learning

- Assessment used by schools and teachers prioritises diagnosis, feedback, and instructional adjustment, particularly in early grades under the responsibility of DPE and school leadership.

- Formative assessment is frequent, age-appropriate, and embedded in classroom routines, rather than concentrated in terminal events.

Signals are credible and stable

- Assessment formats and standards administered by BISE, BMEB, and BTEB are predictable over time.
- Independent learning assessments are recognised by MoPME and MoE as legitimate system diagnostics, not parallel or optional evidence.

Integrity is protected

- Clear separation exists between assessment design, administration, analysis, and use.
- Moderation, transparency, and reporting norms reduce volatility and discretion.
- Teachers and schools are not penalised for reporting poor results when those results reflect genuine learning conditions.

10.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (stabilising assessment signals)

Phase 1 does not seek to redesign the entire assessment architecture. Its purpose is to stabilise signals, reduce distortion incentives, and protect learners and educators from volatility. At present, assessment failure persists because signals are overloaded, inconsistently interpreted, and weakly governed. Phase 1 establishes what must become normal across MoPME-, MoE-, and board-governed systems.

Table 10.1 Proposed Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for assessment, trust, and result integrity

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Low-stakes learning checks	Routine Bangla and mathematics checks in early grades	Makes learning visible without pressure	DPE; Schools
Formative assessment focus	Diagnostic assessment in PPE–Grade 2	Prevents silent early failure	Teachers; PTIs
Feedback timeliness	Feedback provided rapidly enough to influence learning	Delayed feedback does not change practice	Schools
Stability of formats	Assessment formats unchanged within cycles	Reduces anxiety and gaming	BISE; BMEB; BTEB
Transparency rules	Clear communication of assessment purpose and use	Builds family trust	MoPME; MoE
Separation of functions	Learning assessment not used for punitive control	Protects reporting honesty	MoPME; MoE
Public exam restraint	No new high-stakes uses added to examinations	Prevents signal overload	MoPME; MoE

Phase 1 success should be judged by whether assessment signals become calmer, clearer, and more interpretable, not by short-term score movement.

10.4 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation of assessment integrity

Once stability is established, the system can move toward coherence and durability. Phase 2 focuses on convergence between school-based assessment, public examinations, and independent learning assessments. Phase 3 focuses on consolidation through enforceable moderation rules, protected data functions, and institutional learning routines.

These phases assume gradual strengthening of technical and analytical capacity within BANBEIS, examination boards, and relevant directorates. Without this, convergence will remain symbolic.

Table 10.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for assessment, trust, and result integrity

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implementation implications
Assessment balance	Clarify formative vs summative roles	Medium	Requires capacity building
Moderation norms	Institutionalise moderation and standard-setting	Medium	Requires board coordination
Independent assessment	Institutionalise periodic sample-based learning assessment	Medium	Requires protected autonomy
Distortion reduction	Reduce incentives linked to single scores	Medium	Requires policy restraint
Integrity enforcement	Act on repeated breaches of assessment rules	Long	Requires legal clarity
Data credibility	Protect auditability and independence of learning data	Long	Requires governance safeguards

10.5 System responsibility: who owns trust when signals fail

Assessment integrity cannot be delivered by schools or teachers alone.

- Schools and teachers are responsible for honest use of assessment to support learning.
- **BISE, BMEB,** and **BTEB** are responsible for stable formats, transparent standards, and credible moderation.
- **BANBEIS** is responsible for producing reliable, impartial learning evidence that can inform system decisions.
- **MoPME** and **MoE** are responsible for preventing assessment overload, aligning uses of results, and ensuring that poor outcomes trigger support rather than blame.

When trust collapses, responsibility lies not with those who surface uncomfortable evidence, but with the institutions that failed to protect signal integrity.

10.6 Linking forward: from distorted signals to system credibility

This chapter defines what must hold for assessment to support learning and what must become normal during Phase 1. It also sets the direction for restoring coherence and credibility through Phase 2 and Phase 3.

Assessment integrity is a governing test. If learning signals cannot be trusted, planning becomes speculative and reform performative. Restoring trust therefore requires institutional restraint, role clarity, and disciplined use of evidence.

The credibility of the education system depends not on producing reassuring results, but on whether it can learn honestly from its own data.

Chapter 11. Equity, Inclusion, and Language Access

Why this domain matters

- Equity failures are often silent: learners are present but excluded from learning, safety, or meaningful participation.
- The system applies learning expectations as if conditions are uniform, despite predictable variation in readiness, safety, language match, disability access, and instructional time.

- Enrolment and progression can mask exclusion, producing false signals that distort curriculum, assessment, and planning.
- Equity is therefore a credibility condition for learning data and reform claims.

What must hold when equity and inclusion are functioning

- The system would not assume readiness, access, or safety where evidence indicates otherwise.
- Minimum accommodations for disability, language access, safety, and readiness would be enforced as requirements, not discretionary practice.
- Exclusion would be visible in data and supervision routines, and apparent progression without learning would be treated as a warning signal.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Exclusion risk mapping across socio-economic status, gender, disability, language, geography, age, safety, and modality.
- Language access checks in early grades, including audit of language match and support.
- Minimum disability accommodations enforced, including physical and instructional adjustments.
- Learning readiness safeguards applied before expectations escalate.
- Safety and safeguarding protocols enforced with minimum reporting routines.
- Data disaggregation so participation and accommodation failures are recorded rather than masked.
- Escalation triggers so persistent exclusion prompts system correction rather than classroom coping.
- Equity and inclusion gates applied before programmes and rollouts proceed.

Phase 2: convergence

- Movement from guidance to enforceable standards, with scaled enforcement capacity.
- Programme gating used to block non-compliant initiatives with political backing.
- Targeted capital investment where structural barriers persist, rather than dilution through broad activity.
- Language access routines strengthened across materials and staffing where needed.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Integrity enforcement for repeated breaches of assessment rules, with clear authority and follow-up.
- Data credibility protected through auditability and institutional safeguards, so system learning is disciplined rather than performative.
- Results are used to trigger support and correction rather than reassurance or blame.

11.1 The problem: exclusion as a system condition, not a participation gap

Equity failures in Bangladesh's education system are rarely the result of formal exclusion. They arise from system conditions that allow learners to be present in schools while excluded from learning, safety, or meaningful participation. These exclusions are often silent. They do not always trigger dropout, but they consistently distort instructional time use, assessment signals, and progression data.

The system routinely applies learning expectations as if conditions were uniform. In practice, predictable differences in readiness, access, and participation exist across learners, locations, and school modalities. When these differences are not recognised and addressed at system level, the result is not only inequity for affected learners, but loss of credibility in learning signals for the system as a whole.

Socio-economic exclusion and learning readiness failure: Children from low-income households experience chronic constraints on learning readiness linked to food insecurity, schooling costs, child labour exposure, and irregular attendance. In these contexts, instructional time is reduced and cognitive load increased, yet curriculum and assessment expectations remain unchanged.

As a result, apparent progression often masks shallow learning or disengagement. Where readiness constraints persist without system response, learning data lose meaning and remediation burdens are displaced onto teachers and families.

Gendered exclusion across participation, safety, and continuation: Gender parity in enrolment conceals persistent exclusion risks, particularly at transition points. Safety concerns, early marriage, menstrual hygiene constraints, and gendered expectations affect attendance, concentration, and continuation for girls, especially during adolescence.

These risks are unevenly distributed across geography and school environments. When unaddressed, they produce predictable exit and disengagement patterns that are often misclassified as individual choice rather than system failure.

Disability, Special Educational Needs (SEN), and false inclusion: Children with disabilities and special educational needs are frequently excluded through lack of accommodation rather than formal denial of access. Physical barriers, absence of assistive materials, and limited teacher support result in physical presence without participation.

Many such learners remain administratively invisible or misclassified, producing false inclusion and invalid learning signals. Treating enrolment as inclusion obscures the scale of exclusion and delays corrective action.

Language mismatch as an early learning failure: Language mismatch in early grades remains a major source of hidden exclusion. Children whose mother tongue is not Bangla often enter school without access to comprehensible instruction.

Early decoding and comprehension failures are misinterpreted as low ability, leading to rapid divergence in learning outcomes by Grade 3. Once established, these gaps are rarely reversed, yet progression data continue to signal success.

Geography, remoteness, and instructional time loss: In char, haor, coastal, hill tract, and urban informal settlement areas, instructional time loss due to closures, teacher vacancies, transport barriers, and climate disruption is common.

Applying uniform learning expectations under these conditions produces predictable failure. Without explicit recognition of time and access constraints, system signals systematically overstate learning.

Modality, age, and safety-related exclusion: Additional exclusion risks arise from uneven enforcement of minimum standards across school modalities; from over-age enrolment and disrupted schooling histories; and from unsafe or psychologically harmful school environments characterised by bullying, harsh discipline, or trauma. These risks suppress participation and engagement even where formal access exists.

11.2 North Star: what must hold when equity and inclusion are functioning

When equity and inclusion are functioning, the system operates with explicit recognition of variation in learning conditions and enforces minimum safeguards where risk is high.

Learning conditions are credible

- The system does not assume readiness, access, or safety where evidence indicates otherwise.
- Learning expectations reflect real instructional conditions, particularly in early grades and high-risk contexts.

Accommodations are enforced

- Minimum accommodations for disability, language access, safety, and readiness are treated as system requirements.
- Compliance does not depend on individual teacher discretion or school initiative.

Exclusion is visible

- Administrative data capture participation, accommodation, and access failures rather than masking them through aggregates.
- Apparent progression without learning is treated as a warning signal, not success.

11.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (making exclusion visible and enforceable)

Phase 1 establishes the minimum conditions under which learning expectations can be applied credibly. It does not aim to resolve all equity gaps or deliver full inclusion. Its purpose is to ensure that exclusion risks are recognised, that minimum accommodations are enforced, and that the system does not proceed as if learning conditions were uniform where they are not.

At present, many equity failures persist not because they are unknown, but because they are treated as contextual background rather than as binding constraints. Phase 1 corrects this by making exclusion visible and by defining what must become normal across the system before further reform can proceed.

The expectations below apply across all streams and modalities. They are not optional and are not contingent on local initiative. Where they do not hold, the appropriate response is corrective action at system level, not adaptive coping at classroom level.

Table 11.1 Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for equity, inclusion, and language access

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Exclusion risk mapping	Systematic identification of SES, gender, disability, language, geographic, age, safety, and modality risks	Makes silent exclusion visible	DPE; DSHE; BANBEIS
Language access checks	Early-grade instruction audited for language match and support	Prevents early learning divergence	NCTB; DPE
Disability accommodations	Minimum physical and instructional accommodations enforced	Prevents false inclusion	DPE; DSHE
Learning readiness safeguards	Readiness risks identified and mitigated before expectations escalate	Protects signal credibility	MoPME; DPE
Safety and safeguarding	Minimum safety and reporting protocols enforced	Enables participation	MoPME; Directorates
Data disaggregation	Participation and accommodation recorded, not masked	Enables corrective action	BANBEIS
Escalation triggers	Persistent exclusion prompts corrective action, not classroom coping	Shifts burden to system	MoPME; MoE

Phase 1 success should be judged by whether exclusion risks are surfaced and acted upon, not by the volume of activity generated. Where exclusion remains invisible or unaddressed, learning data and assessment signals cannot be trusted.

11.3.1 Equity and inclusion gates (Phase 1)

Minimum practice expectations alone are insufficient if they can be bypassed during programme approval and rollout. To prevent symbolic compliance, Phase 1 introduces explicit equity and inclusion gates that must be satisfied before initiatives proceed.

These gates function as stop-checks. Their purpose is not to slow reform unnecessarily, but to prevent the system from scaling interventions into contexts where learning conditions are known to be compromised.

Table 11.2 Equity and inclusion gates for approval and rollout

Gate	Required evidence	Primary authority
Risk recognition	Documented exclusion risks for target population	DPE; DSHE
Accommodation plan	Minimum accommodations defined and resourced	Directorates
Language feasibility	Language access confirmed for early grades	NCTB
Safety assurance	Safeguarding protocols in place	MoPME
Data visibility	Disaggregated indicators enabled	BANBEIS
Proceed / pause decision	Authority to block or delay rollout exercised	MoPME; MoE

Where these conditions are not met, the appropriate response is to pause, revise, or redirect programmes rather than proceed and absorb failure at school level.

11.4 Phase 2–3: convergence and consolidation

Phase 2 and Phase 3 shift the system from minimum protection to durable consistency. They do not replace Phase 1 discipline. They depend on it.

Once exclusion risks are routinely identified and minimum accommodations enforced, the system can focus on reducing variation, strengthening enforcement, and embedding equity requirements into routine governance processes. These phases are primarily institutional rather than programmatic.

Table 11.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for equity and inclusion

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implications
Enforcement scaling	Move from guidance to enforceable standards	Medium	Requires inspection capacity
Programme gating	Block non-compliant initiatives	Medium	Requires political backing
Capital targeting	Invest where structural barriers persist	Medium	Avoids dilution
Language institutionalisation	Embed multilingual education where needed	Long	Requires materials and staffing
Disability service assurance	Regulate quality across providers	Long	Requires authority
Data credibility	Align EMIS with learning reality	Long	Sustains trust

The objective of convergence is not to expand the number of equity initiatives, but to ensure that minimum conditions hold consistently across locations, modalities, and political cycles.

11.5 System responsibility: who must hold the line

Equity and inclusion cannot be delegated to schools or teachers.

- **MoPME** and **MoE** are responsible for mandate clarity, enforcement authority, and blocking non-compliant programmes.
- **DPE** and **DSHE** are responsible for risk mapping, accommodation enforcement, and disciplined supervision.
- **NCTB** is responsible for language access in curriculum and materials.
- **BANBEIS** and **EMIS authorities** are responsible for making exclusion visible in data rather than masking it.
- **Inspection** and **regulatory bodies** are responsible for ensuring minimum standards apply across school modalities.

Where exclusion persists without response, accountability rests with the system, not with implementers.

11.6 Linking forward: from inclusion discipline to system credibility

Equity is not an add-on to learning reform. It is a credibility condition. When exclusion risks are ignored, learning data lose meaning, assessment signals distort behaviour, and reform claims collapse under scrutiny.

Holding the line on equity, inclusion, and language access is therefore not a values statement. It is a governing requirement.

Chapter 12. Family Interface and Demand-Side Trust

Why this domain matters

- Family behaviour, including private tutoring reliance, is often a rational response to unclear or untrusted system signals.
- Mixed messages arise downstream of curriculum overload, distorted assessment signals, and silent exclusion.
- When families cannot distinguish mastery from promotion, they hedge through tutoring, guidebooks, and parallel assessment.
- Demand-side trust is therefore a signal coherence problem, not a persuasion problem.

What must hold when family trust is functioning

- Families will understand what children are expected to learn at each stage, without technical overload.
- Feedback will be meaningful, regular, and distinguishes learning from marks and promotion.
- Messages from curriculum, assessment, and reporting align so families will not be required to reconcile contradictions.
- Language and accessibility barriers are addressed so signals are interpretable.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Core communication protocol defining the minimum information schools would share with families.
- Learning-focused reporting formats that emphasise progress and gaps, not only marks.
- Plain-language summaries of grade-level learning expectations linked to curriculum priorities.
- Language accessibility measures for relevant language and literacy needs.
- Predictable timing of feedback cycles to build trust through stability.
- Signal discipline to prevent parallel or contradictory notices.
- Signal coherence gates applied before family-facing communication is released.

Phase 2: convergence

- Reporting formats harmonised across schools and streams to reduce variation.
- Accountability for persistent confusion and mixed signals strengthened through escalation.
- Communication routines aligned with reforms in curriculum, assessment, and equity so messages remain coherent.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Accessibility norms institutionalised so language inclusion does not depend on local initiative.
- Stability protected across reform cycles so trust is not repeatedly reset.
- Private tutoring declines as a necessity as signals become reliable and defensible.

12.1 The problem: demand-side behaviour driven by weak system signals

Family behaviour in Bangladesh's education system is often interpreted as a problem of aspiration, awareness, or excessive reliance on private tutoring. This diagnosis is incomplete. In most cases, families are responding rationally to unclear, unstable, or untrusted signals from the formal system.

Across primary and secondary education, families receive limited, inconsistent, or opaque information about what children are expected to learn, whether they are progressing adequately, and how schools interpret performance. Where signals are weak, families substitute their own risk-management strategies, most notably through private tutoring, guidebooks, and parallel assessment practices.

These responses are not expressions of distrust in teachers alone. They reflect uncertainty about curriculum priorities, assessment meaning, and progression standards. When families cannot distinguish between mastery and promotion, or between learning and test preparation, they default to strategies that appear to maximise future opportunity, even when these strategies undermine classroom learning.

These signal failures are not isolated to communication. They are downstream effects of curriculum incoherence (Chapter 9), distorted assessment signals (Chapter 10), and unaddressed exclusion risks that produce false progression and participation data (Chapter 11).

Demand-side behaviour therefore mirrors supply-side incoherence. Where curriculum expectations are overloaded, assessment signals distorted, and exclusion risks unaddressed, families receive mixed messages about what matters. As a result, system credibility erodes from both directions.

This chapter treats family trust as a system signal problem, not a communication deficit or cultural issue. The objective is not to persuade families to behave differently, but to restore clarity, stability, and credibility in the information they receive.

12.1.1 Uncertainty as a driver of private tutoring and parallel systems

Private tutoring expands most rapidly where formal signals are ambiguous. When examinations reward recall over mastery, when report cards lack diagnostic meaning, and when promotion occurs despite weak learning, families cannot infer whether schools are delivering what is required.

In this context, tutoring functions as insurance. It compensates for unclear expectations, protects against examination risk, and substitutes for trusted feedback. Attempts to reduce tutoring demand without addressing these underlying signal failures are therefore unlikely to succeed.

As established in Chapter 10, distorted assessment signals generate rational defensive behaviour. Demand-side trust cannot be restored without assessment integrity.

12.1.2 Weak feedback loops between schools and families

Most families receive limited feedback on what children are learning beyond marks or grades. Information about strengths, gaps, and next steps is often absent, delayed, or delivered in technical language that is difficult to interpret.

Where feedback is inconsistent across schools or teachers, families cannot compare performance or judge adequacy. This weakens trust not only in individual schools, but in system-wide standards.

When feedback does not distinguish learning from promotion, it amplifies the false signals produced by exclusion and uneven accommodation identified in Chapter 11.

12.1.3 Language and accessibility barriers in family communication

For many families, particularly those with low literacy or non-Bangla mother tongues, school communication is inaccessible. Notices, report formats, and guidance are often delivered in technical Bangla or English, without adaptation to audience needs.

This further amplifies uncertainty and exclusion, reinforcing reliance on informal networks and external tutoring providers as sources of interpretation.

Language inaccessibility at the family interface compounds early-grade language mismatch and learning divergence described in Chapter 11, extending exclusion beyond the classroom into decision-making.

12.2 North Star: what must hold when family trust is functioning

When demand-side trust is functioning, families receive signals that are clear, stable, and credible. The following conditions hold.

Expectations are intelligible

- Families understand what children are expected to learn at each stage.
- Curriculum priorities are communicated without technical overload.

Feedback is meaningful

- Schools provide regular, simple feedback on progress and gaps.
- Feedback distinguishes learning from promotion or examination performance.

Signals are consistent

- Messages from curriculum, assessment, and reporting align.
- Families are not required to reconcile contradictory information.

When these conditions hold, family trust functions as a credibility condition for the system rather than as an outcome of persuasion or engagement. Further, private tutoring declines as a necessity rather than being displaced through regulation or persuasion.

12.3 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (restoring signal clarity)

Phase 1 focuses on restoring basic clarity at the family interface. It does not aim to redesign accountability or introduce new engagement programmes. Its purpose is to ensure that families receive a minimum, reliable set of signals about learning and expectations.

At present, communication failures persist not because families are disengaged, but because the system does not prioritise signal coherence. Phase 1 establishes what must become normal across schools and directorates. Where minimum signal clarity does not hold, the system must treat family-facing communication as a risk, not as a neutral activity.

Table 12.1 Proposed Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for family interface and trust

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Core communication protocol	Standardised minimum information schools must share with families	Reduces variation and confusion	MoPME; MoE
Learning-focused reporting	Simple reporting formats emphasising learning progress, not only marks	Restores meaning of feedback	DPE; DSHE
Curriculum clarity	Plain-language summaries of grade-level learning expectations	Aligns family understanding	NCTB
Language accessibility	Communication adapted for language and literacy needs	Prevents exclusion	Directorates
Feedback regularity	Predictable timing of feedback cycles	Builds trust through stability	Schools; Directorates
Signal discipline	Avoidance of contradictory or parallel messaging	Protects credibility	MoPME; MoE

Phase 1 success is judged by whether families can reasonably interpret what schools are signalling about learning, not by satisfaction surveys or engagement metrics. Persistent confusion is a system failure. Where it recurs, escalation and corrective action are required rather than further messaging.

12.3.1 Signal coherence gates (Phase 1)

To prevent communication overload and mixed messaging, system-level decisions that affect families must pass explicit signal coherence gates. Their function is to prevent credibility erosion through parallel or contradictory signals.

Table 12.1a Signal coherence gates for family-facing communication

Gate	Required evidence	Primary authority
Message alignment	Consistency with curriculum and assessment priorities	NCTB; Examination bodies
Comprehensibility	Plain-language review completed	Directorates
Language access	Adaptation for relevant language groups	Directorates
Timing discipline	Alignment with reporting cycles	DPE; DSHE
Duplication check	No parallel or conflicting notices issued	MoPME; MoE

Where these gates are not met, communication should be revised or withheld rather than released and corrected informally. Proceeding despite failed gates shifts risk onto families and schools and undermines system trust.

12.4 Phase 2–3: convergence and consolidation

Phase 2 and Phase 3 focus on embedding clarity and trust into routine system operation. They do not expand communication volume. They reduce noise and inconsistency.

Once minimum discipline holds, convergence efforts can focus on:

- Harmonising reporting formats across schools and streams.
- Strengthening accountability for persistent confusion or mixed signals.
- Aligning family-facing communication with reforms in curriculum, assessment, and equity.

Table 12.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for family interface and trust

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implications
Reporting consistency	Reduce variation across schools	Medium	Requires standard setting
Accountability for clarity	Address persistent signal failures	Medium	Requires escalation
Language institutionalisation	Embed accessibility norms	Long	Requires capacity
Trust durability	Maintain stability across reforms	Long	Requires restraint

The objective is not to increase family engagement activity, but to ensure that what is communicated is reliable and defensible.

12.5 System responsibility: who must hold the line

Demand-side trust cannot be delegated to schools alone.

- **MoPME** and **MoE** are responsible for mandate clarity and signal discipline.
- **NCTB** and **examination bodies** are responsible for alignment between curriculum intent and reported outcomes.
- **DPE** and **DSHE** are responsible for consistent implementation and supervision.
- **Schools** are responsible for delivering required signals, not interpreting system ambiguity.

Where families remain confused, responsibility rests with the system. Persistent signal failure constitutes a governance failure, not a communication gap.

12.6 Linking forward: from trust to system stability

Family trust is not a soft outcome. It is a stabilising condition. When families can interpret system signals with confidence, defensive behaviours decline and pressure on classrooms eases.

This chapter completes the credibility arc established in Chapters 9–11. Curriculum coherence, equity discipline, assessment integrity, and demand-side trust are mutually reinforcing. Failure in any one weakens the others. Holding the line here is therefore essential for sustained learning improvement.

Chapter 13. Digital Enablement and System Discipline

Why this domain matters

- Digital expansion has often proceeded without discipline: siloed design, duplication, outdated platforms, and weak ownership.
- Digitisation has increased reporting and compliance burden by duplicating paper routines rather than replacing them.
- Many initiatives lack explicit linkage to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, or inclusion, and parts of the digital estate have reached functional end-of-life.
- Digital must therefore be governed as a credibility condition: it must reduce burden and strengthen delivery, or it must be blocked, consolidated, or retired.

What must hold when digital enablement is functioning

- Digital will replace manual processes rather than duplicating them, and net user time declines.
- Each system will have an explicit learning or delivery function aligned to curriculum priorities and equity requirements.
- Core functions will work under low-bandwidth conditions and do not widen access gaps.
- No new systems will proceed without consolidation, integration, or retirement of overlaps.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Infrastructure gating: no rollout without verified feasibility for power, connectivity, and devices.
- Duplication audit: platforms mapped, overlaps identified, and resolved.
- Burden audit: time for data entry measured and capped to protect instructional time.
- Learning linkage: each system tied to a permitted learning or delivery function.
- Consolidation rule: new approvals require merger or retirement of existing systems.
- Offline usability for core functions to prevent exclusion.
- Rollout restraint: no parallel pilots without central clearance.
- Digital approval gates required, including learning purpose, duplication check, burden test, feasibility, integration plan, and exit plan.

Phase 2: convergence

- Platform consolidation to a small set of interoperable systems with clear ownership.
- EMIS integration strengthened toward a single source of truth.
- Learning-aligned tools embedded within curriculum delivery rather than parallel content systems.
- Procurement and contracting routines shifted toward service models that support iteration and maintenance.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Measurable net time savings enforced as a durable condition for digital continuation.
- Vendor performance tied to burden reduction and learning-aligned outcomes.
- Retirement and replacement decisions normalised so end-of-life systems do not persist as institutional drag.

13.1 The problem: digital expansion without learning discipline

Digital technologies have expanded rapidly across Bangladesh's education system. Platforms, portals, dashboards, applications, and reporting tools now operate across primary, secondary, madrasah, tertiary, and skills streams. Much of this expansion has been well intentioned, driven by aspirations around modernisation, access, resilience following COVID-19, and visibility of system activity. However, in the absence of discipline, digital growth has generated new system failures rather than resolving existing ones.

Five structural problems now characterise the digital landscape.

First, *digital systems are designed and procured in silos*. Hardware, connectivity, software, content, learning platforms, management information systems, and teacher tools are planned and implemented as separate components rather than as parts of an integrated service. This fragmentation is administrative in origin, not pedagogical. It reflects procurement and governance routines rather than learning needs.

Second, *software is treated as a one-off capital asset rather than a service*. Long procurement cycles, fragmented contracting, and project-based delivery models are poorly matched to short software lifecycles. As a result, platforms are often outdated by the time they are deployed, lack clear ownership, and have no institutional arrangements for iteration, maintenance, or adoption.

Third, *duplication and parallel system building are widespread*. Multiple ministries, divisions, directorates, universities, and programmes commission overlapping platforms that perform similar functions but do not interoperate. Learning management systems, content repositories, reporting dashboards, and teacher portals are repeatedly rebuilt in parallel, consuming public resources without improving system capability.

Fourth, *digital tools have increased reporting and compliance burden*. In many cases, digital systems have digitised paper routines rather than eliminated them. Data entry requirements have expanded without subtraction, drawing instructional and supervisory time away from teaching, support, and school engagement.

Fifth, *linkage to learning is weak or implicit*. Many digital initiatives are justified in terms of access, innovation, or visibility, but lack a clear instructional, pedagogical, assessment, or inclusion function. Where learning gains occur, they are often incidental rather than designed.

A further, under-acknowledged condition is that *parts of the system's digital estate have reached functional end-of-life*. These platforms may still operate technically, but no longer

support teaching, learning, or administration in ways that are reliable, interoperable, or proportionate to their cost. Continued operation in such cases creates institutional drag rather than value. Treating all systems as indefinitely maintainable obscures the need for disciplined retirement and replacement decisions at system level.

As with curriculum overload and assessment distortion, these failures are not the result of weak effort at school level. They are the predictable outcome of a system that approves digital initiatives without consolidation, gating, or enforceable learning criteria. Expecting teachers, headteachers, or field officers to absorb digital complexity through informal prioritisation is neither realistic nor fair.

This chapter treats digital enablement as a *system credibility condition*. Digital tools must reduce burden, clarify learning priorities, and strengthen delivery. Where they do not, they must be blocked, paused, consolidated, or withdrawn.

13.2 North Star: what must hold when digital enablement is functioning

When digital enablement is functioning, a small and observable set of conditions holds across the system. These conditions define what must be true if digital is to support learning rather than undermine it.

Digital reduces burden

- Digital systems replace manual processes rather than duplicate them.
- Reporting, monitoring, and communication time declines rather than expands.
- Teachers, schools, and field officers experience net time savings.

Digital strengthens learning

- Digital services are explicitly linked to curriculum priorities, pedagogy, assessment, or inclusion.
- Tools support instruction, practice, feedback, diagnosis, or coordination rather than parallel content delivery.
- Learning expectations are clarified rather than obscured.

Digital improves access without widening gaps

- Core functions operate under low-bandwidth and low-device conditions.
- Accessibility and inclusion are designed in from the outset.
- Digital expectations align with infrastructure reality.

No new systems without consolidation

- New platforms are approved only where duplication is removed.
- Existing systems are integrated, merged, or retired before expansion.
- Fragmentation is treated as a system failure, not a transition phase.

This North Star sets the benchmark against which Phase 1 minimum practice expectations and later consolidation must be judged.

13.3 The limited functions digital is permitted to perform

Digital technologies can support learning and system delivery, but only within clearly defined boundaries. This chapter does not treat digital as a solution to structural failures elsewhere in the system. Digital is permitted to perform a limited set of functions and must not substitute for curriculum discipline, protection of instructional time, assessment integrity, or adequate staffing.

Given the short lifecycle of software and the need for continuous iteration to maintain reliability, most digital functions should be provisioned through service-based arrangements rather than bespoke public-sector builds. Full public ownership and large platform construction should be reserved for a small number of core systems where sovereignty, data stewardship, or statutory control make this essential. For most instructional, assessment, operational, and communication tools, licensing or contracting established, domain-expert services already operating at scale offers better value, faster deployment, and clearer accountability. Treating software as a continuous service rather than a one-off capital asset reduces technical debt, aligns with global development cycles, and avoids the recurrent failures associated with project-based builds. In this model, the state's responsibility is not to act as a default platform developer, but to govern interoperability, discipline duplication, enforce learning alignment, and hold providers accountable for performance and burden reduction.

Legitimate digital service domains include the following.

Instructional support
Digital tools may support lesson planning, sequencing, and differentiation where they reflect curriculum priorities established in Chapter 9 and do not expand content or pace.

Practice, feedback, and mastery
Low-stakes practice tools, adaptive exercises, and immediate feedback may support foundational literacy and numeracy where classroom time is constrained, consistent with Chapter 6's learning foundations logic.

Assessment and diagnostics
Digital tools may support formative assessment, gap identification, and progress tracking, provided they do not redefine learning priorities, inflate stakes, or undermine the assessment integrity conditions set out in Chapter 10.

Teacher professional support
On-demand training, coaching, and communities of practice may extend reach, particularly in hard-to-staff areas, where they are embedded in system routines rather than layered as optional platforms.

Family communication and trust
Digital channels may clarify learning expectations, attendance, and progress where communication is simple, multilingual, and credible, reinforcing the demand-side trust logic in Chapter 12.

Inclusion and accessibility
Assistive technologies, alternative formats, and multilingual resources may reduce access barriers where designed intentionally and supported institutionally.

Operational efficiency
Digital systems may streamline EMIS, deployment tracking, and resource planning where they replace paper processes and reduce duplication rather than increase reporting load.

Digital tools must **not** be used to:

- compensate for curriculum overload,
- substitute for protected instructional time,
- bypass assessment discipline,
- offset teacher shortages or overcrowding,
- or transfer system adjustment costs onto schools and families.

When digital is asked to perform these functions, failure is predictable.

13.4 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (restoring digital discipline)

Phase 1 is a restraint phase. Its purpose is not innovation, expansion, or piloting. It is to stop harm, reduce burden, and restore credibility by setting minimum conditions for any digital system in use or under consideration.

At present, digital failure persists not because objectives are unclear, but because additions are rarely blocked, duplication carries few consequences, and retirement decisions are avoided. Phase 1 establishes what must become normal.

Table 13.1 Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for digital enablement

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Infrastructure gating	No digital rollout approved without verified power, connectivity, and device feasibility	Prevents impossible expectations	MoPME; MoE
Duplication audit	All platforms mapped; overlapping functions identified and resolved	Stops platform layering	MoPME; MoE
Burden audit	Time required for data entry and reporting measured and capped	Protects instructional time	Directorates
Learning linkage	Each system explicitly linked to a learning or delivery function	Prevents symbolic digitisation	Line agencies
Consolidation rule	New systems approved only with retirement or merger of existing ones	Enforces discipline	Central approval authority
Offline usability	Core functions usable under low-bandwidth conditions	Prevents exclusion	Implementing agencies
Rollout restraint	No parallel pilots without central clearance	Avoids fragmentation	MoPME; MoE

Phase 1 success should be judged by whether digital burden is visibly declining and whether redundant systems begin to be withdrawn. Where minimum conditions are not met, approvals must be paused or cancelled rather than adapted informally at school level.

13.4.1 Digital approval gates: how systems move forward

To operationalise restraint, all digital systems must pass through explicit approval gates prior to rollout or renewal.

Table 13.2 Digital enablement gates (Phase 1)

Gate	Required evidence	Authority
Learning purpose	Clear instructional, assessment, inclusion, or efficiency function	Line agency
Duplication check	Demonstrated removal or merger of overlapping tools	Central authority
Burden test	Evidence of net time savings for users	Directorates
Infrastructure feasibility	Verified access conditions in target areas	Implementers
Integration plan	Confirmed interoperability with core data systems	MoPME; MoE
Exit plan	Defined conditions for retirement or replacement	Approving authority

No digital system should proceed without satisfying all gates. Where evidence is incomplete, timelines must be extended rather than expectations compressed. Risk must remain with the system, not with schools.

13.5 Artificial intelligence: amplification under discipline

Artificial intelligence, including generative tools, adaptive systems, and automated analytics, intensifies both opportunity and risk.

AI may support:

- personalised practice aligned to curriculum priorities,
- faster formative feedback,
- teacher preparation and administrative assistance,
- early identification of learning gaps,
- system-level analysis for planning and deployment.

However, AI also amplifies existing system failures:

- weak curriculum signals scale faster,
- opaque decision-making increases,
- surveillance and reporting burden expands,
- inequities widen where data and devices are uneven,
- experimentation accelerates without accountability.

AI therefore falls under *stricter discipline*, not looser rules. Any AI-enabled system must meet all Phase 1 gates, demonstrate learning value, and show net burden reduction. Pilots must be

time-bound, decision-bound, and reversible. AI is not exempt from consolidation, restraint, or retirement.

13.6 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation

Once Phase 1 discipline is holding, the system may move from containment to durability.

Table 13.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for digital enablement

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implications
Platform consolidation	Reduce to a small number of interoperable systems	Medium	Requires political backing
EMIS integration	Establish a single source of truth	Medium	Requires governance clarity
Learning-aligned tools	Embed digital support within curriculum delivery	Medium	Requires coordination
Net time-savings	Enforce measurable workload reduction	Long	Requires monitoring
Contract enforcement	Tie vendor performance to burden and learning outcomes	Long	Requires legal authority

These phases are not additive. They depend on Phase 1 restraint holding consistently.

13.7 System responsibility: who must hold the line

Digital discipline cannot be delegated to schools or teachers.

- **MoPME** and **MoE** are responsible for approval discipline, consolidation decisions, and political restraint.
- **Directorates** are responsible for burden control, rollout discipline, and enforcement.
- **Implementing agencies** are responsible for infrastructure feasibility and user-centred design.
- **Procurement authorities** are responsible for contract structures that support integration, iteration, and retirement.

Where digital overload persists, the failure is systemic, not behavioural.

13.8 Linking forward: from digital discipline to system credibility

Digital enablement is not a symbol of modernity. It is a test of governance.

If the system cannot say no to duplication, cannot retire failing platforms, and cannot protect instructional time, digital expansion will continue to erode credibility. When disciplined, digital tools can strengthen learning, inclusion, and efficiency. When undisciplined, they accelerate fragmentation. Holding the line here is therefore not a technical choice. It is a governing one.

Chapter 14. Pathway Coherence, Retention, and Transitions

Why this domain matters

- Learner loss is concentrated at predictable transition points, yet responsibility for cohort survival is diffuse and weakly governed.
- Examination-linked exits, opaque eligibility rules, weak equivalency, and limited recovery routes mean learners who fall behind have few structured ways back.
- Many learners remain nominally enrolled while disengaged, repeating grades or attending irregularly until exit becomes inevitable.
- Without owned transitions and recovery routes, pathways formalise loss rather than protect learners.

What must hold when pathways are functioning

- Learners will be tracked across key transition points and exit without qualification or recovery option becomes exceptional.
- Transition rules will be clear, and assessment and certification do not operate as silent exit mechanisms.
- Recovery routes will exist, are recognised, and are accessible without stigma or administrative blockage.
- Hidden disengagement will be detected early and triggers response.

Phase 1: minimum practice expectations

- Exit-point mapping across stages and streams, published and owned.
- Early warning routines using attendance, repetition, and assessment signals to detect disengagement.
- Transition protocols defining progression rules at key stages.
- Basic recovery options defined, including minimum bridge or re-entry routes.
- Cohort tracking where feasible to assign responsibility for survival across stages.
- Escalation when loss persists at the same points, rather than adaptive classroom coping.

Phase 2: convergence

- Transition redesign to reduce examination-linked exits that operate as silent failure points.
- Operationalisation of BNQF equivalency through recognition rules and aligned assessment practices.
- Second-chance pathways expanded with recognised certification alignment.

Phase 3: consolidation

- Lifelong learning coordination strengthened across non-formal, TVET, and adult learning through durable cross-ministry governance.
- Tertiary coherence strengthened through common governance and accreditation where required.
- Pathway survival becomes a defended system norm, with persistent loss triggering system-level correction.

14.1 The problem: learner loss at transition points is unowned

Bangladesh's education system has expanded access across multiple streams and stages, but has not protected learners as they move between them. Dropout, stagnation, and disengagement are concentrated at predictable transition points: between primary and secondary, lower and upper secondary, general and madrasah streams, schooling and skills, and formal and non-formal provision.

These losses are often treated as individual failure, household constraint, or labour market pull. In practice, they reflect system design. Examination-linked exits, opaque eligibility rules, weak equivalency, and lack of recovery routes mean that once a learner falls behind, there are few structured ways back. Many learners remain nominally enrolled while disengaged, repeating grades or attending irregularly until exit becomes inevitable. Others complete programmes but cannot transition because credentials are not recognised or pathways are unclear.

Responsibility for these outcomes is diffuse. No single institution owns cohort survival across stages, and no mechanism escalates persistent loss as a system failure requiring correction. Multiple streams operate in parallel, but transitions between them are weakly governed. The result is not only dropout, but wasted learning, stalled progression, and erosion of system credibility.

This chapter treats pathway failure as a governance problem rather than a participation problem. Retention and transition must be actively protected, not assumed.

14.2 North Star: what must hold when pathways are functioning

When pathway coherence is functioning, a small number of observable conditions hold across the system.

Cohort survival improves

- Learners are tracked across key transition points.
- Exit without qualification or recovery option becomes exceptional rather than routine.
- Hidden disengagement is detected early.

Transitions are protected

- Movement between stages and streams is governed by clear rules.
- Assessment and certification do not operate as silent exit mechanisms.
- Institutions are required to plan for transitions, not merely deliver programmes.

Recovery routes exist

- Second-chance and bridge pathways are available, recognised, and resourced.
- Re-entry is possible without stigma or administrative blockage.
- Learning, not age or institutional origin, determines progression.

This North Star defines what must be true before pathway alignment can be considered credible.

14.3 Where equity and pathway risk intersect

Pathway failure is not evenly distributed. Equity concerns arise most sharply where structural disadvantage intersects with transition points. These include learners affected by poverty, gendered expectations, disability, language barriers, geography (including char, haor, coastal, and hill tract areas), and enrolment in marginalised streams such as madrasah or non-formal provision.

For these learners, weak transitions compound disadvantage. Examination failure, lack of recognised equivalency, or absence of nearby recovery options often results in permanent exit. Without deliberate protection, pathways reproduce inequality even where access has expanded.

Equity in this chapter is therefore not framed as additional targeting, but as system obligation: the system must not allow predictable loss at known pressure points.

14.4 Phase 1: minimum practice expectations (stopping unowned loss)

Phase 1 is a restraint and protection phase. Its purpose is to stop avoidable loss by making exits visible, owned, and actionable. It does not aim to redesign pathways or harmonise streams.

Table 14.1 Phase 1 minimum practice expectations for pathway protection

Practice area	What must be normal	Why this matters	Primary system owner
Exit-point mapping	All formal exit points mapped and published	Makes loss visible	MoPME; MoE
Early warning routines	Attendance, repetition, and assessment signals tracked	Detects disengagement	Directorates
Transition protocols	Clear rules for progression at key stages	Prevents silent exits	Boards; Directorates
Basic recovery options	Minimum bridge or re-entry routes defined	Prevents permanent loss	Line agencies
Cohort tracking	Learners tracked across stages where feasible	Assigns responsibility	Central agencies

Phase 1 success is judged by whether exits decline and whether institutions are required to respond when loss persists. Where learners are repeatedly exiting at the same points, escalation must occur. Adaptation at classroom level is not an acceptable substitute.

14.5 Proposed BNQF and equivalency: necessary but not sufficient

The proposed Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF) is a critical enabling instrument for pathway coherence. It provides the basis for equivalency, credit recognition, and movement across formal, non-formal, and skills pathways.

However, the proposed BNQF alone does not protect learners. Without operational rules, aligned assessment practices, and institutional obligation to recognise equivalency, the framework remains aspirational. In Phase 1, BNQF's role is therefore limited but essential: to clarify what qualifications exist, what they are equivalent to, and where progression should be possible.

Full activation of proposed BNQF as a pathway integration tool belongs to later phases, once retention and recovery mechanisms are holding.

14.6 Phase 2 and Phase 3: convergence and consolidation

Only once unowned loss is contained can the system move toward coherence across streams. Phase 2 focuses on reducing fragmentation and strengthening alignment. Phase 3 consolidates these gains through legislation, regulation, and durable coordination.

Table 14.2 Phase 2–3 convergence directions for pathways

Convergence area	Direction of reform	Time horizon	Implications
Transition redesign	Rework exam-linked exits	Medium	Requires assessment reform
Cross-stream alignment	Operationalise BNQF equivalency	Medium–Long	Requires recognition rules
Second-chance pathways	Scale recognised recovery routes	Medium	Requires certification alignment
Lifelong learning	Coordinate NFE, TVET, and adult learning	Long	Requires cross-ministry governance
Tertiary coherence	Common governance and accreditation	Long	Requires legislation

These phases depend on Phase 1 discipline. Integration without retention would formalise loss rather than resolve it.

14.7 System responsibility: who must hold the line

Pathway protection cannot be delegated to families or learners.

- **MoPME** and **MoE** are responsible for defining transition rules and escalation.
- **Boards** and **directorates** are responsible for assessment and progression signals.
- **BNFE, TVET,** and **tertiary bodies** are responsible for recognised recovery routes.
- **Central agencies** are responsible for tracking, transparency, and accountability.

Where learners continue to be lost at known transition points, the failure is systemic.

14.8 Linking forward: from survival to coherence

This chapter establishes survival as the credibility test for pathways. Before aligning streams, the system must demonstrate that it can keep learners, detect risk, and offer recovery. Coherence across general, madrasah, non-formal, and skills pathways is essential work, but it must be sequenced.

A system that cannot protect learners through transitions cannot claim to offer pathways.

PART III: MONITORING, ENFORCEMENT, AND ADAPTATION

Chapter 15. System Integrity, Monitoring, and National Response Routines

15.1 Purpose and scope

This chapter governs how the education system observes whether its core signals are holding in Phase 1, and how those observations convert into time-bound obligations to review, respond, and escalate. It defines the minimum signal set the system is permitted to observe, the national routines through which those signals are reviewed, and the decision responsibilities that follow.

The purpose of monitoring under the NLIF is not surveillance, performance ranking, or comprehensive measurement. Its function is to protect *system integrity*: to ensure that the rules, routines, and incentives through which the system communicates what matters in practice continue to align with learning, equity, and system credibility.

Phase 1 monitoring is therefore deliberately constrained. Signals are observed only where deviation would distort behaviour or undermine delivery, and only at a frequency that allows the responsible institution to act within the same planning cycle. Signals that do not inform a decision, or that cannot plausibly trigger a response, are excluded by design.

This chapter applies across all institutions listed in Annex B. Signal ownership and response authority are assigned according to statutory mandate and operational control. Through this and the following chapters, references to indicators will be made. Annex A provides details of these indicators.

15.2 What is seen: Phase 1 system signals

Under the NLIF, a system signal is not a data point and not a performance metric. A signal is a rule, routine, or incentive through which the education system communicates what matters in practice and shapes behaviour by default, even in the absence of instruction or enforcement.

Signals operate through curriculum scope, assessment formats, instructional time, progression rules, reporting requirements, digital systems, and the distribution of discretion and support. When these signals weaken, fragment, or contradict one another, behaviour adapts accordingly, regardless of stated policy intent.

For Phase 1, a signal qualifies for monitoring only if all four conditions below are met:

- **Decision relevance**
  The signal informs a specific decision or obligation to act.
- **Named ownership**
  A responsible institution is identifiable and empowered to respond.
- **Benchmark clarity**
  A minimum expectation is defined in advance.
- **Response feasibility**
  A credible corrective action is possible within 30–60 days.

Signals that fail any of these conditions are not included in Phase 1, regardless of analytic interest or data availability. Measurement without decision authority is treated as signal noise.

The Phase 1 signal set is anchored directly to the minimum practice expectations set out in Part II. It is limited to domains where failure would undermine learning integrity, equity, or system credibility. These domains are:

- **Foundational learning and early grades**
  Early-grade reading and numeracy routines, instructional time delivered, and short-cycle learning retention signals.
- **Classroom practice and instructional time**
  Scheduled instructional minutes delivered and time lost to interruptions.
- **Professional minimums and staffing integrity**
  Posting stability in early grades, teacher presence, and supervision coverage.
- **Curriculum coherence and pacing**
  Alignment across curriculum, textbooks, and assessments, particularly at key transition points.
- **Assessment stability and integrity**
  Stability of formats, alignment with curriculum, and avoidance of premature or misaligned high-stakes expansion.
- **Equity, inclusion, and language access**
  Disability accommodation compliance, early-grade language scaffolding, and readiness-related exclusion risks.
- **Family-facing signal coherence**
  Clarity and consistency of assessment, progression, and expectation messages to families.
- **Digital discipline and system load**
  Teacher reporting burden, platform duplication, and system reliability.

No additional indicators may be added to the Phase 1 signal set without substitution, in line with the initiative substitution rule (S17). Expansion without retirement is treated as signal dilution.

What Phase 1 deliberately excludes

Phase 1 does not include:

- exploratory or research indicators,
- school-level rankings or league tables,
- indicators without a clear institutional owner,
- indicators requiring long-cycle evaluation,
- indicators that increase teacher reporting burden.

These may be considered in later phases only if they meet NLIF signal discipline requirements.

15.3 What must happen: benchmarks and response windows

Each Phase 1 signal is paired with a minimum benchmark and a response window. Benchmarks define adequacy, not excellence. Response windows convert deviation into obligation. Benchmarks in Phase 1 are set conservatively to prioritise credibility over precision. The objective is stabilisation of behaviour, not optimisation.

Response windows operate as follows:

- **Initial review**: within 7–14 days of signal confirmation
- **Corrective action plan**: within 30–45 days
- **Escalation trigger**: at 60 days, or earlier where repeat failure is detected

Failure to respond within the defined window constitutes non-response under Chapter 16, regardless of explanation, intent, or contextual justification.

Example: instructional time delivered

Signal: Daily instructional minutes delivered
Benchmark: ≥ 85 per cent of scheduled time delivered
Lead owner: Directorate of Primary Education

Response sequence

- Review within 14 days
- Corrective plan within 30 days

Escalation

- Persistent shortfall triggers governance action to remove competing demands
- Repeat failure escalates to division level

This signal does not assess teaching quality. It protects the minimum condition under which teaching can occur.

15.4 What stops or escalates: routines, ownership, and burden controls

Phase 1 monitoring operates through two linked national routines designed to ensure visibility without burden, and obligation without performativity.

Monthly internal response pack

A consolidated internal response pack is produced monthly, organised by reform domain rather than by institution. The pack includes:

- signal status against benchmarks,
- identification of new deviations,
- status of outstanding corrective actions,
- repeat failures and cross-domain contradictions.

The pack is circulated only to institutions with response authority. Receipt of the pack carries an obligation to act. Silence is treated as non-response.

Limited public signal set
A small, stable public signal set is published at district or division level. This set is limited to system-level signals that affect public trust, including:

- instructional time delivered,
- cohort retention at key transition points,
- assessment stability,
- exclusion and accommodation compliance.

No school-level comparisons or rankings are published. The purpose is legitimacy and transparency, not competition.

Every Phase 1 signal has a single lead owner, even where multiple agencies are involved. Joint ownership is not permitted at the signal level. Ownership entails responsibility for initiating review, coordinating corrective action, documenting completion, and triggering escalation where required.

Where ownership is contested or unclear, the signal is escalated under the cross-agency alignment rules (S8, S13). Ambiguity is treated as a governance failure, not a technical issue.

To protect instructional time and system focus, Phase 1 monitoring is subject to strict burden controls:

- Measurement time for teachers is capped under S16.
- New signals require retirement of existing ones.
- Indicators that do not trigger decisions are removed.
- Digital systems must not duplicate data already collected elsewhere.

15.5 How this adapts without fragmenting the system

Phase 1 monitoring is not static. Signals are reviewed annually for continued relevance and decision value. Removal is treated as success where the underlying risk has been stabilised. Persistence without purpose is treated as failure.

Adaptation under this chapter is limited to adjustment of benchmarks, response windows, or signal retirement. It does not permit expansion of the Phase 1 signal set without substitution, nor does it allow reopening of the non-negotiables established in Parts I and II.

Where benchmarks are missed, responses delayed, or repeat failures detected, matters proceed automatically to the corrective and escalation mechanisms set out in Chapter 16. There is no discretionary pause between observation and obligation.

Signal integrity is protected not by observation alone, but by the certainty that deviation will trigger response.

Chapter 16. Enforcement, Escalation, and Corrective Action

16.1 Purpose and scope

This chapter governs how the education system responds when minimum expectations defined in Part II are not met. It establishes how benchmarks become obligations, how obligations convert into time-bound actions, and how unresolved failure results in automatic escalation of authority.

The purpose of enforcement under the NLIF is not punishment, attribution of blame, or performance management. Its function is to ensure that clearly defined system signals are acted upon in time to protect learning integrity, equity, and system credibility. Where the system fails to respond to its own evidence, authority must move.

This chapter applies across all institutions listed in Annex B. Enforcement operates across institutional boundaries and follows the escalation pathways defined in Chapter 4. The S-series rules provide the binding conditions under which response clocks, escalation, and pause authority are triggered.

16.2 What is seen: non-response, repeat failure, and system breach

Under the NLIF, enforcement is triggered not by poor outcomes but by *failure to act* on clearly defined signals. Three categories of system breach are recognised:

- **Non-response**
  Non-response occurs when a required review or corrective action is not completed within the response window defined in Chapter 15. Acknowledgement, explanation, or intention does not constitute response.
- **Repeat failure**
  Repeat failure occurs when the same benchmark is breached across consecutive cycles without structural or procedural adjustment, even where responses have been formally recorded. Repetition without correction is treated as a system learning failure.
- **System breach**
  System breach occurs where actions or approvals actively undermine signal integrity, including misaligned rollouts, burden-increasing initiatives, or violations of non-negotiable safeguards.

Detection of any of these conditions triggers the obligations set out in this chapter.

16.3 What must happen: response obligations and clocks

Under the NLIF, a response is an action, not an explanation.

For a response to be recognised, it must meet all three conditions:

- **Named ownership**
  A responsible unit or authority is identified.
- **Time specificity**
  The action has a defined completion date within the applicable response window.

- **Evidence of execution**
  Documentation demonstrates that the action has been taken, not merely proposed.

Statements of constraint, historical context, or future planning do not satisfy response requirements.

Enforcement follows a support-first accountability logic. Before escalation occurs, the responsible authority must demonstrate that:

- guidance has been issued where expectations were unclear,
- resources, coaching, or administrative correction have been offered where failure was system-generated,
- constraints within the same mandate have been addressed.

Support, however, does not suspend obligation. Once expectations are explicit and support has been made available, failure to respond within the defined window activates escalation automatically.

The NLIF does not permit indefinite support without correction. Continued failure following support requires movement of authority.

16.4 What stops or escalates: escalation ladders and pause authority

Escalation under the NLIF is procedural, not discretionary. When triggering conditions are met, authority moves automatically along the escalation ladder defined in Chapter 4.

The standard escalation pathway is:

School or institution
→ Upazila or equivalent local authority
→ Directorate
→ Division
→ Apex ministry

At each step, the receiving authority acquires decision rights proportionate to the failure identified. These may include authority to mandate corrective routines, reallocate supervision or staffing, pause or halt initiatives, or require redesign of instruments or processes.

Escalation does not imply fault at lower levels. It reflects the principle that unresolved failure must be addressed at the level capable of resolving it.

The NLIF also includes explicit stop and pause authority to protect system coherence. Approvals, rollouts, or expansions must be paused when:

- curriculum, assessment, and supervision signals are misaligned,
- new initiatives increase reporting or administrative burden without substitution,
- digital systems duplicate data or increase system load,
- indicators used in decisions lack independent verification,
- exclusion, accommodation, or language access minimums are breached.

Pauses remain in effect until the triggering condition is resolved. No exception may be granted on the basis of urgency, political commitment, or sunk cost.

Example: pause triggered by misalignment

A revised assessment format is introduced while curriculum pacing guidance and textbook revisions remain incomplete.

Signal breach
Curriculum–assessment misalignment confirmed.

Required action
Immediate halt to assessment rollout.
Joint corrective action across curriculum, assessment, and supervision units.

Escalation
If alignment is not restored within the response window, authority moves to the division level.

16.5 How this adapts without fragmenting the system

Corrective action under this chapter feeds directly into the adaptation mechanisms set out in Chapter 17. Where enforcement reveals repeated failure across cycles, redesign or termination of initiatives becomes mandatory.

Adaptation under enforcement may alter routines, sequencing, or instruments. It may not reopen non-negotiables, weaken safeguards, or introduce parallel accountability systems.

This chapter does not introduce new benchmarks, indicators, or performance targets. It exists solely to ensure that when minimum expectations are breached, the system responds in time, and authority moves when it does not.

Enforcement under the NLIF is not sustained by discretion or goodwill. It is sustained by clocks, ownership, and certainty.

Chapter 17. System Adaptation and Course Correction

17.1 Purpose and scope

This chapter defines how the education system adjusts its routines when evidence demonstrates that current arrangements are not working, without reopening the non-negotiables established in Part I or weakening the minimum expectations set out in Part II.

The purpose of adaptation under the NLIF is not experimentation, innovation, or piloting for its own sake. Its purpose is correction. Where signals persistently fail, where corrective action under Chapter 16 does not resolve the underlying problem, or where unintended consequences emerge, the system must be able to change how it operates while preserving coherence, discipline, and burden control.

This chapter applies across all institutions listed in Annex B. It governs adaptation at the level of routines, instruments, sequencing, and implementation design. It does not authorise changes to learning goals, equity commitments, or institutional mandates without formal revision of the NLIF.

What adaptation is — and is not — under the NLIF

Adaptation is:

- a time-bound decision to continue, adjust, or stop an existing routine,
- triggered by evidence already authorised under Chapters 15 and 16,
- focused on correcting system behaviour, not testing alternatives.

Adaptation is not:

- piloting without a decision window,
- experimentation detached from enforcement,
- redesign that reopens minimum expectations,
- learning activities that do not change routines.
- Any activity that does not result in a decision within the adaptation window is treated as non-response and escalated under Chapter 16.

17.2 What is seen: evidence that triggers adaptation

Adaptation under the NLIF is triggered only by evidence that meets three conditions.

First, the evidence must arise from signals already authorised under Chapters 15 and 16. No parallel evidence streams, pilots, or bespoke monitoring arrangements are permitted.

Second, the evidence must demonstrate one or more of the following:

- persistent benchmark failure despite documented corrective action,
- repeat failure as defined under S7,
- cross-domain contradiction that cannot be resolved through enforcement alone,
- unintended system effects, including burden escalation, signal distortion, or exclusion risks.

Third, the evidence must be attributable. There must be clarity about which routine, instrument, or sequencing choice is producing the failure.

Evidence that is exploratory, descriptive, or detached from decision authority does not qualify. Learning without consequence is treated as noise.

17.3 What must happen: adaptation obligations and decision windows

When qualifying evidence is confirmed, the responsible authority is required to initiate a formal adaptation decision process. This process is time-bound and outcome-restricted.

The adaptation process must conclude within one to two implementation cycles, depending on the domain. Open-ended review is not permitted.

Every adaptation process must result in one of three decisions only:

1. **Continue**
   The routine or instrument is retained, with confirmation that corrective action under Chapter 16 has resolved the issue. Continued monitoring applies.
2. **Adjust**
   Specific changes are made to routines, instruments, sequencing, or implementation design. Adjustments must be documented, time-bound, and integrated into existing system processes.
3. **Stop**
   The initiative, routine, or instrument is terminated. Termination includes withdrawal of approvals, cessation of funding, and removal from monitoring packs.

No fourth category exists. Redesign without decision, extension without evidence, or indefinite piloting is not permitted.

Decisions must be recorded, owned, and communicated to the institutions responsible for implementation. Failure to reach a decision within the adaptation window constitutes non-response and triggers escalation under Chapter 16.

17.4 What stops or escalates: protection against fragmentation

Adaptation under the NLIF is bounded by explicit safeguards to prevent system fragmentation.

Adaptation may not:

- add new indicators without retiring existing ones,
- introduce parallel reporting or monitoring arrangements,
- weaken minimum practice expectations defined in Part II,
- override pause or stop conditions triggered under S5, S15, S16, or S17,
- reintroduce initiatives previously terminated without explicit reauthorisation.

Where proposed adjustments risk violating these conditions, the adaptation process is halted and escalated.

Example: terminating an initiative through adaptation

Context
A digital teacher support platform continues to operate after corrective action, but Phase 1 signals show:

- persistent reporting burden,
- low routine use,
- duplication with existing supervision processes.

Persistent failure to adapt, including repeated continuation decisions in the face of unresolved evidence, is treated as a governance failure. In such cases, authority moves automatically to the next level capable of resolving the issue, including the power to terminate initiatives unilaterally.

17.5 How adaptation strengthens the system without reopening it

Adaptation under this chapter strengthens the system by enforcing learning discipline, not by expanding choice.

Successful adaptation results in one of three outcomes:

- stabilisation of signals,
- reduction in system burden,
- improved alignment across domains.

Learning that leads to no behavioural change is not retained. Reports, evaluations, and lessons that do not alter routines are archived and removed from decision processes.

Where an initiative improves outcomes and aligns with NLIF rules, it is absorbed into standard routines and ceases to be treated as exceptional. Where it fails, it is exited cleanly, and the system moves on.

In this way, adaptation under the NLIF functions as a correction mechanism, not an innovation pipeline. The system learns by changing what it does, not by accumulating knowledge about what it might do.

Chapter 18. Financing, Procurement, and Resource Flows Aligned to the NLIF

18.1 Purpose and scope

This chapter governs how financing, procurement, and resource flows interact with the National Learning Implementation Framework. Its purpose is to ensure that money, approvals, and procurement processes cannot unintentionally undermine learning integrity, increase system burden, or fragment signals established under Parts I and II.

This chapter does not create new funding instruments, budget envelopes, or expenditure priorities. It governs how existing and future financial decisions are screened, sequenced, paused, or redirected so that they remain consistent with NLIF phase discipline, burden controls, and signal coherence.

The chapter applies to all institutions listed in Annex B that exercise authority over financing, procurement, approvals, or resource allocation, including line ministries, directorates, boards, and agencies operating under development programmes or projects.

18.2 What is seen: financial signals and evidence

Under the NLIF, financing and procurement are not neutral delivery mechanisms. They act as system signals by shaping incentives, workload, sequencing, and institutional behaviour. Phase 1 therefore monitors only those financial signals that directly affect learning conditions or system coherence.

The following financial and procurement signals enter the system under this chapter:

- **Procurement-induced burden**
  Evidence that new procurements, tools, or programmes increase reporting, compliance, or administrative load on teachers or schools (I8, S16).
- **System duplication**
  Overlap between platforms, data systems, reporting formats, or delivery mechanisms that replicate existing functions (I9).
- **Verification and leakage risk**
  Integrity of school-level grants, transfers, and material flows, including reconciliation and verification coverage (F10).
- **Phase misalignment**
  Financing or procurement proposals that advance expansion, digitisation, or assessment reform ahead of prerequisite conditions defined in Part I Chapter 4.
- **Initiative layering**
  Introduction of new activities without retirement or substitution of existing ones (S17).

Only evidence that triggers a decision is included. Detailed financial audits, expenditure tracking, or value-for-money studies remain outside the scope of Phase 1 unless they activate one of the above signals.

18.3 What must happen: obligations and response windows

Where a financial or procurement signal indicates risk or misalignment, the following obligations apply.

Screening obligation

All new procurements, programme expansions, and major financing decisions must be screened against NLIF rules prior to approval. Screening must explicitly assess:

- additional reporting or compliance burden,
- duplication with existing systems,
- phase readiness,
- substitution or retirement of existing initiatives.

Response obligation
Where a signal breach is identified, the responsible authority must:

- review the proposal or activity within 14 days,
- issue a corrective decision within 30–45 days, which may include redesign, deferral, consolidation, or cancellation.

Verification obligation

For school-level grants and transfers, random verification sampling must be conducted as specified under F10. Failure to meet verification thresholds automatically constrains further discretionary releases.

Failure to act within the response window constitutes non-response and triggers escalation under Chapter 16.

Example: procurement blocked due to burden creation

A digital attendance platform is proposed for national rollout.

Screening identifies:

- duplication with existing EMIS reporting,
- additional daily reporting time for teachers,
- no substitution of existing systems.

Decision:
Approval is paused under I8, I9, and S16.

Required action:
Platform redesign or consolidation proposal within 30 days.

Outcome:
If burden is not demonstrably reduced, procurement is cancelled. No exception is permitted on the basis of sunk cost or donor commitment

18.4 What stops or escalates: gates, pauses, and authority movement

Financing and procurement decisions are subject to automatic gates under the NLIF. These gates are binding and non-discretionary.

Approvals, disbursements, or rollouts must be **paused** when:

- procurement increases reporting or administrative burden without substitution (I8, S16),
- systems duplicate existing platforms or data flows (I9),
- initiatives advance beyond Phase readiness conditions,
- verification of school-level funds falls below required thresholds (F10),
- new initiatives violate the substitution ratio (S17).

Pauses remain in effect until the triggering condition is resolved. Political priority, external financing, or programme timelines do not override pause authority.

Where repeated breaches occur, or where misalignment persists across cycles, authority escalates automatically to the next level capable of resolution, in line with Chapter 16.

Financial integrity as a system signal

Under the NLIF, leakage is not treated solely as a fiduciary issue. It is a learning signal.

Unverified grants distort:

- material availability,
- instructional time,
- trust in system signals.

For this reason, failure to verify does not merely trigger audit. It constrains future discretion and redirects authority to protect learning conditions.

18.5 How this adapts without fragmenting the system

Adaptation under this chapter is governed, not permissive.

Where financing or procurement repeatedly generates burden, duplication, or misalignment, adaptation takes one of three forms only:

- **Consolidation**
  Merging platforms, reporting streams, or delivery mechanisms to reduce load.
- **Deferral**
  Sequencing investments to later phases when prerequisites are met.
- **Termination**
  Ending initiatives that cannot be aligned with NLIF rules.

No adaptation may introduce parallel systems, temporary exemptions, or pilot carve-outs that bypass NLIF discipline. Learning from failed procurements or financing decisions is absorbed through revised screening criteria, not additional oversight layers.

This chapter ensures that resources follow the logic of the system, rather than forcing the system to contort around resources.

Chapter 19. Five-Year Consolidated Sequencing Roadmap

19.1 Purpose and scope

This chapter consolidates sequencing decisions across domains into a single five-year roadmap. Its purpose is not to forecast activities, list projects, or create a forward plan that binds future governments. Its purpose is to govern trade-offs.

The roadmap exists to protect coherence, learning integrity, and institutional capacity over time by forcing explicit choices under constraint. It translates the phase logic of Part I and the minimum expectations of Part II into a disciplined ordering of action, delay, and restraint.

Without an explicit sequencing mechanism, ambition accumulates faster than capacity, reforms overlap before foundations are secure, and political pressure converts partial progress into fragile expansion. This chapter exists to prevent that outcome.

This chapter applies to all institutions listed in Annex B. It governs how initiatives are sequenced, deferred, consolidated, or retired across phases, and how political, fiscal, and capacity pressures are absorbed without reopening the NLIF's non-negotiables.

19.2 What is seen: dependencies, risks, and cumulative system load

The five-year roadmap is constructed from three classes of information that enter the system under this chapter. These are not performance metrics. They are governing inputs.

Cross-domain dependencies
Evidence of prerequisite relationships across domains, including but not limited to:

- early-grade learning stability required before assessment expansion,
- curriculum coherence required before textbook rollout,
- supervision and posting stability required before new instructional expectations,
- digital reliability and burden control required before digital mandates.

Dependencies are treated as binding constraints. Where they are unresolved, advancement is blocked by default.

System load and absorption capacity
Evidence of cumulative pressure on the system, including:

- total reporting and compliance time,
- number of concurrent initiatives affecting the same actors,
- supervision coverage relative to school density,
- frequency of reform-related disruptions to instructional time.

System load is assessed longitudinally, not initiative by initiative. An initiative that is sound in isolation may still be deferred if it contributes to overload.

Risk signals
A consolidated risk register is maintained covering:

- political risk, including pressure for premature visibility or symbolic rollout,
- capacity risk, including staffing, supervision, and implementation bandwidth,
- measurement and signal risk, including volatility, distortion, or erosion of credibility.

Only risks that require sequencing, deferral, or consolidation decisions are included. Risks that do not alter system behaviour are excluded.

19.3 What must happen: prioritisation rules and sequencing obligations

The roadmap is governed by explicit obligations that convert evidence into binding sequencing decisions.

Dependency-first sequencing: No initiative may advance to implementation if its prerequisite conditions, as defined in Parts I and II, are unmet. Where dependencies are unresolved, sequencing defaults to deferral without exception.

Phase discipline: Initiatives are sequenced strictly according to Phase 1–3 logic. Phase advancement requires evidence that minimum expectations in the preceding phase are holding. Political or fiscal readiness does not substitute for phase readiness.

Explicit de-prioritisation: Where capacity, fiscal space, or system load is exceeded, initiatives must be explicitly deferred, consolidated, or retired. Informal delay, quiet slowing, or indefinite piloting does not constitute de-prioritisation.

Example: protecting coherence through deferral

Pressure arises to introduce a new national assessment at Grade 4.

Evidence shows:

- curriculum pacing remains unstable,
- early-grade learning benchmarks are not holding,
- supervision coverage is below minimum thresholds.

Decision:
Assessment introduction is deferred for two years.

Rationale:
Advancing the assessment would amplify signal distortion, increase exit risk, and redirect attention away from foundational correction.

Outcome:
Resources are redirected to stabilise early grades and supervision. The deferral decision is recorded in the roadmap to prevent repeated reconsideration under political pressure.

Annual reaffirmation: The roadmap is reaffirmed annually through a formal decision that:

- confirms what advances,
- specifies what remains deferred and why,

- identifies what is retired or consolidated.

Additions to the roadmap require substitution under S17. Expansion without retirement is prohibited.

Failure to apply these rules constitutes a governance failure and triggers escalation under Chapter 16.

19.4 What stops or escalates: overload protection and binding trade-offs

This chapter gives the roadmap stopping power.

Initiatives must be blocked or deferred automatically when:

- cumulative reporting or compliance load exceeds caps,
- multiple domains attempt simultaneous expansion affecting the same actors,
- political timelines conflict with phase readiness,
- risk registers indicate elevated likelihood of signal failure or credibility loss.

Where de-prioritisation decisions are contested, bypassed, or repeatedly reopened, authority escalates to the level capable of enforcing trade-offs, in line with Chapter 16.

The roadmap therefore functions as a shield as much as a plan. It absorbs ambition, political urgency, and donor pressure and converts them into disciplined sequencing decisions that protect the system as a whole.

What de-prioritisation protects

De-prioritisation under the NLIF protects:

- instructional time,
- signal coherence,
- staff capacity and morale,
- public trust in reform.

Deferral is not failure. It is a governing choice to preserve the conditions under which reform can succeed.

19.5 How this adapts without fragmenting the system

Adaptation under this chapter occurs through controlled re-sequencing, not expansion.

Where evidence shows that an initiative is not delivering, or that system conditions have shifted, the roadmap permits:

- advancement to be slowed,
- initiatives to be consolidated,
- activities to be retired entirely.

Adaptation may change timing, emphasis, or modality. It may not multiply initiatives, reopen non-negotiables, or dilute phase discipline.

Learning is absorbed through fewer, clearer commitments over time. The roadmap ensures that progress is cumulative rather than episodic, and that the system advances by choosing deliberately, not by attempting everything at once.

19.6 Closing function of the NLIF

This chapter closes the NLIF by making restraint as explicit as ambition.

Parts I and II define what must be protected and what minimum practice looks like. Part III defines how the system governs itself under pressure. This chapter ensures that those rules survive contact with time, politics, and scale.

The NLIF succeeds not by doing more each year, but by doing the right things in the right order, and by refusing to move when conditions are not ready.

That discipline is the system's strongest safeguard.

Appendix A. Proposed Indicator Architecture for Operationalising the NLIF

A.1 Purpose and governing status

This Appendix sets out a *proposed indicator architecture* required to operationalise the National Learning Implementation Framework (NLIF). It identifies the types of indicators that, taken together, would allow the system to detect learning failure, govern sequencing, trigger corrective action, and exit ineffective arrangements.

At this stage, Appendix A is architectural and propositional**.** It does not assume that all indicators listed are currently available, measured, or institutionally owned. Nor does it presume that the indicator set is final.

The purpose of this Appendix is to provide a coherent starting point for engagement, refinement, and settlement of an indicator framework capable of governing learning-focused reform under the NLIF.

A.2 Scope and organisation of the indicator architecture

Indicators authorised under the NLIF span the system conditions that shape learning in practice. They are organised in Table A1 into the following families:

- Learning outcomes
- Learning behaviour
- Classroom and school practice
- Teacher conditions and support
- Assessment use and credibility
- Readiness and inclusion
- Family and community interface
- Curriculum coherence and renewal
- Digital enablement and system burden
- Retention, dropout, and recovery
- System governance, responsiveness, and implementation discipline

Together, these families are intended to provide system-wide coverage of the conditions under which learning succeeds or fails, without reducing learning to a single metric or institutional locus.

Indicators are designed to bind institutions and system-level actors, not individual learners, teachers, or schools. Their purpose is to test whether system arrangements, incentives, resources, and coordination mechanisms are enabling learning in practice, and whether institutional responses are adequate when failure becomes visible.

Inclusion of an indicator does not imply operational control by a single agency. Ownership, response obligations, and escalation pathways are determined through the NLIF's governance provisions and decision rules, recognising that many learning failures arise from interactions across mandates rather than from isolated institutional actions.

A.3 Indicator construction and evidentiary standards

Indicators listed in this Annex differ in their level of maturity and mode of construction. They include:

- indicators already measured within the system;
- indicators derivable through adaptation of existing instruments;
- indicators requiring structured observation, sampling, or proxy construction; and
- indicators that would need to be generated through new system capabilities.

The inclusion of an indicator does not imply immediate or universal measurement. It signals that, if the NLIF is to function as intended, the system will require some credible way of observing or approximating the underlying condition**.**

Engagement on this Annex should therefore focus not only on *whether* an indicator is desirable, but on *how* it could be made feasible, proportionate, and resistant to behavioural distortion.

A.4 Common phase logic across indicators

All indicators in Table A1 operate under a shared three-phase logic.

Phase 1: Signal and credibility
Phase 1 establishes visibility and confidence that a signal reflects reality rather than artefact. Expectations focus on baseline credibility, pattern detection, and exposure of gaps. Absence of credible signals constitutes system blindness and requires corrective action.

Phase 2: Improvement and convergence
Phase 2 requires demonstrable improvement, convergence, or stabilisation following Phase 1 visibility. Improvement may be absolute or relative, depending on indicator type and context. Stagnation or regression during Phase 2 is treated as a failure to respond, not as neutrality.

Phase 3: Threshold and accountability
Phase 3 applies where minimum expectations remain unmet after Phase 2 response, or where repeated failure indicates structural weakness. At this phase, accountability mechanisms are activated, including redesign, mandate correction, escalation, suspension, or termination of instruments.

Progression between phases is not automatic. Indicators may stall, regress, or be reclassified based on evidence. Persistent stagnation is itself a governing signal.

A.5 Heterogeneity and escalation discipline

Indicators are interpreted with explicit recognition of system heterogeneity. Performance is assessed relative to baseline conditions, feasibility of improvement, and comparable contexts facing similar constraints.

For this reason, the NLIF does not rely on fixed numerical thresholds across the indicator set. Escalation is governed by persistence and response failure, not absolute levels alone.

Decision triggers arise where evidence shows:

- stagnation after credible baselines are established;
- regression after initial improvement;
- repeated failure despite corrective action;
- unexplained divergence across comparable contexts; or
- recurrence of identical failures across cycles.

Escalation is always system-facing. It targets curriculum design, assessment architecture, deployment rules, governance arrangements, coordination mechanisms, or institutional mandates. The NLIF does not authorise punitive action against individuals on the basis of indicator signals.

A.6 Phased activation and indicator maturity

The indicator set specified in Table A1 defines the full indicator architecture required to operationalise the NLIF over time. It does not imply that all indicators must be activated, measured, or reported simultaneously. Indicators are authorised**,** not automatically activated**.**

At any point in time, only a managed subset of indicators may be active for decision-making purposes, subject to feasibility, data readiness, institutional capacity, and governance priorities. Activation is phased to ensure credibility, proportionality, and burden control.

Activation follows three principles:

Selective initiation: Initial implementation may prioritise a limited number of indicators from each indicator family to ensure system-wide coverage without overloading any institution. Early activation focuses on indicators that:

- reflect core learning conditions;
- are already partially observable through existing data or practice; or
- are critical for establishing credibility of the NLIF.

Proxy and developmental indicators: Where direct measurement is not yet feasible, indicators may be operationalised using agreed proxies, sampling methods, or developmental instruments. Such indicators remain valid within the NLIF architecture while measurement capability is built.

Indicators may therefore exist in one of three maturity states:

- *inactive* (authorised but not yet measured);
- *proxy-based* (measured indirectly or through sampling); or
- *fully operational* (measured routinely with established methods).

Progressive expansion and consolidation: Over time, the active indicator set is expected to expand, contract, or be substituted as capacity improves and system needs evolve. Expansion is not additive by default. New activations must respect the NLIF's substitution and burden-control rules.

The long-run objective is not to maximise the number of active indicators, but to ensure that all critical system functions that shape learning are governable through evidence.

A.7 Public versus internal indicator visibility

The indicator architecture is designed primarily for internal system governance**.** Most indicators are intended to guide diagnosis, sequencing, and escalation within government and are not suitable for routine public reporting.

A limited subset of indicators may be designated as public-facing where transparency serves a governing purpose, such as establishing reform credibility, signalling priorities, or anchoring public trust.

Public designation does not alter phase logic, decision triggers, or accountability discipline. Indicators may be added to or removed from public view as evidence quality, behavioural risk, or system conditions change.

For clarity, indicators proposed for potential public visibility are highlighted in green in Table A1. All other indicators are assumed to be internal unless explicitly designated otherwise.

A.8 Engagement, settlement, and transition to governance

This Annex is intended to be engaged with, tested, and settled through consultation with relevant ministries, agencies, and system actors.

Through this process, institutions are expected to:

- agree which indicators are essential for NLIF governance;
- determine appropriate measurement approaches and proxies;
- clarify ownership, response obligations, and escalation pathways; and
- confirm which indicators should be public and which should remain internal.

Once settled through agreed governance processes, the indicator architecture becomes a governing instrument for NLIF-scoped decisions, subject to revision as system capacity evolves.

A.9 Authority of Table A1

Table A1 sets out the proposed indicator architecture, including indicator definitions, system domains, phase expectations, and indicative decision triggers.

Until the architecture is formally settled, Table A1 functions as a design and engagement reference. Once settled, the agreed version of Table A1 becomes the operational reference for applying the NLIF indicator framework.

Table A1. List of indicators.

ID	Indicator statement	SDG alignment	What this indicator reveals	Phase 1 expectation (signal & credibility)	Phase 2 expectation (improvement & convergence)	Phase 3 expectation (threshold & accountability)	Decision trigger if stagnant or worsening
A. Learning Outcomes							
A1	Reading fluency at grade-appropriate level	SDG 4.1.1(a)	Whether learners can decode text automatically enough to access meaning	Baseline visibility of fluency gaps by grade and location using simple, credible measures	Year-on-year upward movement in proportion of learners reaching grade-appropriate fluency	Persistent sub-threshold fluency triggers curriculum pacing, instructional time, and early-grade teaching review	Diagnosis of instructional time, early-grade teaching conditions, curriculum load, and teacher deployment in affected contexts.
A2	Reading comprehension of unseen text	SDG 4.1.1(a)	Whether learners can extract and construct meaning rather than recall rehearsed content	Introduction of low-stakes unseen text checks to establish credibility of comprehension signals	Reduction in gap between decoding ability and comprehension across grades	Sustained weak comprehension despite fluency triggers review of pedagogy and assessment alignment	Diagnosis of pedagogy, assessment alignment, and exposure to unseen text in affected contexts.
A3	Ability to summarise content orally	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learners can process, organise, and express understanding verbally	Initial sampling to make oral language expectations visible	Increasing proportion of learners able to summarise without prompting	Persistent weakness triggers review of classroom interaction time and language use norms	Diagnosis of classroom interaction time, oral language use, and instructional norms.
A4	Ability to write a short explanation	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learners can organise ideas in writing rather than reproduce text	Baseline evidence on explanatory writing collected through short tasks	Improvement in clarity and coherence of written explanations across grades	Continued weakness triggers review of writing instruction and curriculum overload	Diagnosis of instructional time, language exposure, task use, and assessment signals in affected contexts.
A5	Vocabulary growth over time	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether language exposure and instruction are cumulative rather than stagnant	Establishment of simple longitudinal vocabulary tracking through sampling	Consistent upward movement in vocabulary breadth across cohorts	Stagnation triggers review of language-rich instruction and reading exposure	Diagnosis of language-rich instruction, reading materials, and instructional time allocation.

A6	Numeracy fluency in basic operations at grade level	SDG 4.1.1(b)	Whether learners have automaticity required for higher-order problem-solving	Baseline visibility of numeracy fluency gaps by grade	Reduction in proportion of learners lacking basic operational fluency	Persistent deficits trigger review of early numeracy instruction and pacing	Diagnosis of early numeracy instruction, pacing, and practice routines.
A7	Ability to solve non-routine problems	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learners can apply knowledge beyond familiar formats	Introduction of simple non-routine tasks to reveal application gaps	Increasing share of learners attempting and partially solving non-routine problems	Low application despite content coverage triggers pedagogical review	Diagnosis of task use, scaffolding, and assessment alignment.
A8	Ability to explain reasoning steps	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learning is conceptual rather than procedural	Baseline sampling of reasoning explanations using simple rubrics	Growth in proportion of learners giving coherent reasoning	Persistent weakness triggers review of questioning and feedback practices	Diagnosis of questioning practices, feedback routines, and student talk time.
A9	Ability to apply learning to new contexts	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learning transfers across subjects and situations	Initial diagnostics to identify transfer gaps	Improved transfer performance across grades and subjects	Weak transfer triggers cross-curricular coherence review	Diagnosis of sequencing, instructional time protection, and assessment signals.
A10	Error correction after feedback	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether feedback leads to learning rather than compliance	Visibility of whether learners revise work after feedback	Increasing proportion of learners improving after feedback cycles	No improvement triggers review of feedback quality and timing	Diagnosis of feedback timing, quality, and opportunities for revision.
A11	Learning retention across terms	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learning accumulates or decays over time	Baseline comparison of end-of-term and start-of-term performance	Reduced learning decay between terms	Persistent decay triggers review of curriculum load and reinforcement routines	Diagnosis of curriculum load, reinforcement routines, and instructional continuity.
A12	Learning loss after school breaks	SDG-aligned (4.1)	System fragility under interruption and shock	Measurement of post-break learning loss to establish exposure	Reduction in magnitude of post-break learning loss	Large or widening loss triggers review of continuity supports	Diagnosis of exposure, access to materials, and instructional continuity by context.
B. Learning Behaviour							

B1	Student attendance consistency	SDG 4.1.2	Whether learners are able and willing to attend regularly	Reliable attendance recording with visibility by grade and location	Reduction in irregular attendance patterns in affected contexts	Persistent irregular attendance indicates unresolved access or readiness barriers	Diagnosis of meals, safety, scheduling, and access barriers in affected contexts
B2	Late arrival frequency	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Loss of effective instructional time at start of day	Baseline visibility of lateness patterns by school and location	Reduction in late arrivals over time	Continued lateness indicates routine or access failure	Diagnosis of transport arrangements, daily routines, and school start practices
B3	Classroom participation rate	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learners are cognitively engaged rather than passive	Introduction of simple participation observation norms	Increase in active participation across lessons	Persistently low participation indicates pedagogical or norm-setting weakness	Diagnosis of pedagogy, classroom norms, and participation opportunities
B4	Willingness to attempt unfamiliar tasks	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Learner confidence to engage with challenge	Baseline evidence of learner task-attempt behaviour	Increased willingness to attempt unfamiliar tasks	Continued avoidance indicates risk-averse instructional or feedback climate	Diagnosis of feedback practices, task framing, and classroom safety
B5	Time spent actively engaged during lessons	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Quality of engagement rather than presence alone	Establishment of light engagement observation sampling	Increase in proportion of lesson time spent actively engaged	Persistently low engagement indicates lesson design or pacing constraints	Diagnosis of lesson design, pacing, and instructional load
B6	Task completion rates	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learners can follow through on learning tasks	Baseline visibility of task completion patterns	Improved completion without increased copying or dependency	Persistent non-completion indicates misalignment of task demands and support	Diagnosis of task design, instructional support, and learner workload
B7	Drop-off in engagement during lessons	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Attention decay within lesson structure	Identification of points where engagement consistently collapses	Reduction in mid-lesson disengagement	Continued drop-off indicates structural or pacing weakness	Diagnosis of lesson structure, pacing, and instructional methodology
B8	Student self-reported confidence	SDG-aligned (4.7)	Learner identity and perceived competence	Baseline confidence trends established through pulse instruments	Upward movement in confidence indicators over time	Low confidence despite learning gains indicates feedback or climate failure	Diagnosis of feedback practices, assessment communication, and classroom climate

B9	Student aspiration clarity	SDG 4.4.1	Whether learners see pathways beyond schooling	Baseline evidence of learner awareness of pathways	Improved clarity of aspirations over grades	Persistent confusion indicates weak guidance or relevance signalling	Diagnosis of guidance provision, curriculum relevance, and pathway signalling
B10	Student disengagement incidents	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Early warning of behavioural withdrawal or exclusion	Consistent and credible recording of disengagement incidents	Reduction in repeated disengagement events	Rising incidents indicate unresolved climate or support failures	Diagnosis of school climate, support provision, and exclusion practices
C. Classroom and School Practice							
C1	Daily instructional minutes delivered	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether scheduled learning time reaches learners	Baseline visibility established for time delivered versus timetable by location	Year-on-year increase in proportion of scheduled time delivered	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of time loss drivers in affected contexts; escalate only if systemic drivers persist.
C2	Instructional time lost to interruptions	SDG-aligned (4.1)	System leakage from non-instructional demands	Baseline visibility established for sources and frequency of interruptions	Year-on-year reduction in interruption-related time loss	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of governance, coordination, and competing demands; escalate only if systemic drivers persist.
C3	Lesson start-time consistency	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Reliability of classroom routines	Baseline visibility established for lesson punctuality patterns	Year-on-year improvement in lesson start-time consistency	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of staffing, scheduling, and supervision constraints in affected contexts.
C4	Lesson pacing aligned to student understanding	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Instructional responsiveness to learning evidence	Baseline visibility established for pacing practices through observation	Year-on-year increase in adaptive pacing practices	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of curriculum feasibility, assessment pressure, and instructional support.
C5	Instructional interaction quality	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Balance of active learning, student talk, and questioning	Baseline visibility established through structured classroom observation	Year-on-year increase in interactive and dialogic instruction	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of task design, questioning practices, materials, and instructional support.

C6	Frequency of practice opportunities	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Opportunities for consolidation and mastery	Baseline visibility established for practice frequency	Year-on-year increase in meaningful practice opportunities	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of curriculum density, sequencing, and time protection.
C7	Stability of daily classroom routines	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Predictability supporting attention and trust	Baseline visibility established for routine stability	Year-on-year improvement in routine consistency	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of operational, staffing, and support conditions.
C8	Headteacher instructional leadership practice	SDG 4.c	Leadership protection of learning time and feedback	Baseline visibility established through leadership practice index	Year-on-year improvement in instructional leadership behaviours	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of authority, workload, and leadership support conditions.
D. Teacher Conditions and Support							
D1	Teacher absenteeism	SDG 4.c.1	Continuity of instruction	Baseline visibility established for absenteeism by location	Year-on-year reduction in absenteeism gaps	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of deployment, safety, supervision, and support conditions.
D2	Teacher turnover rate	SDG-aligned (4.c)	System stability and retention	Baseline visibility established for exits by grade and location	Year-on-year stabilisation of turnover in priority grades	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of workload, posting, and support conditions.
D3	Teacher workload and time use	SDG-aligned (4.c)	Burnout risk and diversion from instruction	Baseline visibility established for workload components	Year-on-year reduction in non-instructional workload	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of reporting, task duplication, and system-imposed demands.
D4	Frequency of classroom observation	SDG 4.c.1	Whether instruction is seen and supported	Baseline visibility established for observation coverage	Year-on-year convergence toward minimum observation norms	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of supervision capacity, allocation, and training.
D5	Quality of feedback to teachers	SDG-aligned (4.c)	Actionability of instructional feedback	Baseline visibility established through rubric-based sampling	Year-on-year improvement in feedback specificity and usefulness	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of supervision quality, time, and coaching support.

D6	Teacher access to coaching	SDG 4.c.1	Availability of skill development support	Baseline visibility established for coaching access	Year-on-year expansion of access in priority grades	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of resource allocation and deployment constraints.
D7	Teacher autonomy over pacing	SDG-aligned (4.c)	Professional trust and responsiveness	Baseline visibility established for permitted pacing flexibility	Year-on-year increase in adaptive pacing practices	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of curriculum feasibility and assessment pressure.
D8	Teacher fear of sanction	SDG-aligned (16.6)	Data distortion and avoidance risk	Baseline visibility established through protected climate instruments	Year-on-year reduction in reported fear indicators	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of governance signals, supervision behaviour, and accountability climate.
D9	Teacher willingness to report problems	SDG 16.6.2	System learning capacity	Baseline visibility established for reporting rates	Year-on-year increase in timely problem reporting	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of trust, protection mechanisms, and feedback loops.
D10	Tenure stability in early-grade postings	SDG 4.c	Continuity in foundational grades	Baseline visibility established for tenure patterns	Year-on-year improvement in posting stability	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of transfer drivers and posting practices.
D11	Supervisor-to-school coverage feasibility	SDG 4.c	Whether supervision is operationally feasible	Baseline visibility established for ratios and coverage	Year-on-year improvement in feasible supervision coverage	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of workload distribution and supervisory capacity.
E. Assessment Use and Credibility							
E1	Frequency of formative assessment	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether learning is checked regularly	Baseline visibility established for formative assessment frequency	Year-on-year increase in regular formative checks	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of time constraints and assessment load.
E2	Time from assessment to feedback	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Speed of learning correction	Baseline visibility established for feedback lag	Year-on-year reduction in feedback lag	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of assessment volume and workflow.

E3	Use of assessment evidence for instructional adjustment	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Whether assessment changes instruction	Baseline visibility established for regrouping and adjustment practices	Year-on-year increase in evidence-informed instructional adjustment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of authority, instructional support, and supervision practices.
E4	Stability and predictability of assessment signals	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Credibility of assessment outcomes	Baseline visibility established for format and grading stability	Year-on-year reduction in unexplained volatility	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of moderation capacity and reform churn drivers.
E5	Assessment-related behavioural distortion	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Narrowing, anxiety, and teaching-to-the-test risk	Baseline visibility established through observation and pulse instruments	Year-on-year reduction in distortion indicators	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of assessment load, stakes, and incentive signals.
E6	Transparency of assessment criteria and marking	SDG 4.1	Insulation from narrative pressure	Baseline visibility established for publication and communication practices	Year-on-year improvement in transparency and understanding	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of governance, communication, and integrity safeguards.
F. Readiness and Inclusion							
F1	Pre-primary participation	SDG 4.2.2	Access to early preparation	Baseline visibility established for participation by location	Year-on-year increase in participation in priority areas	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of supply, access, and demand barriers in affected contexts; escalate only if systemic drivers persist.
F2	Language exposure prior to Grade 1	SDG 4.2.1	Readiness risk from language mismatch	Baseline visibility established using agreed exposure proxies	Year-on-year improvement in early language exposure	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of home, community, and programme alignment factors.
F3	Nutrition adequacy during school day	SDG 2.1.2	Capacity to attend and concentrate	Baseline visibility established for coverage and continuity	Year-on-year improvement in consistent provision	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of delivery, targeting, and coordination failures.

F4	Hunger-related attendance disruption	SDG 2.1.2	Direct learning barrier	Baseline visibility established for hunger-linked disruption	Year-on-year reduction in disruption	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of welfare linkage, targeting, and household access constraints.
F5	Fatigue-related disengagement	SDG-aligned (3.4)	Health–learning interaction	Baseline visibility established through observational proxies	Year-on-year reduction in fatigue signals	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of timetable design, workload, and health supports.
F6	Emotional safety incidents	SDG 16.1	Psychological safety	Baseline visibility established through incident reporting	Year-on-year reduction in incidents	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of safeguarding, supervision, and response capacity.
F7	Bullying prevalence	SDG 16.1	Participation barrier	Baseline visibility established for prevalence by context	Year-on-year reduction in bullying indicators	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of school climate, prevention routines, and response mechanisms.
F8	Access to basic wellbeing support	SDG 3.8	Stabilisation capacity	Baseline visibility established for service access	Year-on-year expansion of access in priority zones	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of deployment, referral pathways, and service capacity.
F9	Attendance disruption due to household stress	SDG 1.2	Exposure to external shocks	Baseline visibility established for disruption patterns	Year-on-year reduction in volatility	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of household linkage and cross-sector support reach.
F10	Verification of school-level grants and funds	SDG 16.6	Leakage undermining learning conditions	Baseline visibility established through verification sampling	Year-on-year improvement in reconciliation integrity	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of fund flow, oversight, and accountability gaps.
F11	Home-language scaffolding in early grades	SDG 4.5	Silent early exclusion	Baseline visibility established for scaffolding availability and use	Year-on-year increase in classroom use where needed	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of material availability, guidance clarity, and teacher support.
F12	Accessibility and accommodation compliance	SDG 4.5	Invisible exclusion of learners with disability	Baseline visibility established for compliance status	Year-on-year improvement in accommodation provision	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of capex constraints, enforcement, and support gaps.

G. Family and Community Interface							
G1	Parent–school communication frequency	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Visibility of learning to families	Baseline visibility established for communication frequency	Year-on-year increase in regular contact	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of leadership practice and communication norms.
G2	Clarity of communication to families	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Comprehension of information	Baseline visibility established through clarity pulses	Year-on-year improvement in understanding	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of format, language, and delivery barriers.
G3	Language accessibility of information	SDG 4.5.1	Inclusion	Baseline visibility established for language access	Year-on-year expansion of multilingual provision	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of compliance, resourcing, and prioritisation gaps.
G4	Family understanding of learning expectations	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Alignment between home and school	Baseline visibility established for understanding	Year-on-year improvement in alignment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of guidance clarity and curriculum signalling.
G5	Family trust in learning and assessment signals	SDG-aligned (4.1)	System legitimacy	Baseline visibility established through trust pulses	Year-on-year improvement in trust indicators	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of assessment credibility and communication integrity.
G6	Household reliance on private tutoring	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Public system failure proxy	Baseline visibility established for reliance patterns	Year-on-year reduction in “necessary” tutoring	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of instructional adequacy and signal reliability.
G7	Household education expenditure driven by uncertainty	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Risk-hedging behaviour	Baseline visibility established for expenditure proxies	Year-on-year reduction in uncertainty-driven costs	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of signal instability and information gaps.
G8	Community participation in school activities	SDG 16.7.2	Social capital	Baseline visibility established for participation levels	Year-on-year increase in engagement	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of outreach practices and inclusion barriers.
H. Curriculum Coherence and Renewal							

H1	Curriculum feasibility relative to instructional time	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Overload risk	Baseline visibility established for scope–time feasibility	Year-on-year improvement in feasibility	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of scope, pacing, and instructional time constraints.
H2	Content density per grade	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Pacing feasibility	Baseline visibility established for density patterns	Year-on-year reduction in excessive density	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of sequencing and consolidation opportunities.
H3	Redundancy across subjects	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Inefficiency	Baseline visibility established through redundancy audit	Year-on-year reduction in duplication	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of governance ownership and coordination failures.
H4	Curriculum–textbook alignment	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Signal consistency	Baseline visibility established for alignment	Year-on-year improvement in alignment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of procurement, guidance, and revision processes.
H5	Removal of outdated or low-value content	SDG-aligned (4.7)	Adaptation capacity	Baseline visibility established through content inventory	Year-on-year reduction in outdated content	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of curriculum governance and revision discipline.
H6	Clarity of learning objectives	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Instructional focus	Baseline visibility established for objective clarity	Year-on-year improvement in clarity	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of guidance design and communication.
H7	Coherence across grade transitions	SDG-aligned (4.1)	Learning continuity	Baseline visibility established for transition coherence	Year-on-year reduction in transition breaks	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of sequencing and transition support design.
I.	**Digital Enablement and System Burden**						
I1	Reliability of electricity during school hours	SDG 9.1.1	Feasibility condition	Baseline visibility established for reliability	Year-on-year improvement in uptime	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of infrastructure and cross-sector coordination failures.

I2	Internet availability during lessons	SDG 9.c.1	Access condition	Baseline visibility established for availability	Year-on-year expansion of reliable access	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of infrastructure readiness before digital mandates.
I3	Device functionality	SDG-aligned (4.a)	Usability	Baseline visibility established for functional devices	Year-on-year improvement in functionality	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of maintenance, procurement, and support arrangements.
I4	Teacher access to digital instructional materials	SDG 4.a.1	Instructional support	Baseline visibility established for access	Year-on-year expansion of access	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of content deployment and access constraints.
I5	Purposeful use of digital resources	SDG-aligned (4.a)	Actual uptake	Baseline visibility established for use patterns	Year-on-year increase in purposeful use	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of relevance, training, and instructional fit.
I6	Teaching time saved through digital tools	SDG-aligned (4.a)	Efficiency	Baseline visibility established for time-use proxies	Year-on-year net time savings	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of tool design and workflow integration.
I7	Student access to learning materials	SDG-aligned (4.a)	Learning opportunity	Baseline visibility established for access frequency	Year-on-year increase in access	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of platform design and access barriers.
I8	Reporting burden created by digital systems	SDG-aligned (4.c)	Distortion risk	Baseline visibility established for reporting burden	Year-on-year reduction in duplication	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of system design and governance discipline.
I9	Data duplication across platforms	SDG-aligned (16.6)	Inefficiency	Baseline visibility established for duplication	Year-on-year reduction in duplication	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of platform overlap and consolidation barriers.
I10	Digital system downtime	SDG-aligned (9.1)	Operational risk	Baseline visibility established for downtime	Year-on-year reduction in downtime	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of vendor performance and contract enforcement.

R. Retention, Dropout and Recovery							
R1	Grade-specific dropout	SDG 4.1, 4.5	Where learners exit the system	Baseline visibility established by grade and location	Year-on-year reduction in priority contexts	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of learning conditions, support provision, and access barriers in affected contexts.
R2	Dropout following sustained learning failure	SDG 4.1	Link between learning breakdown and exit	Baseline visibility established for learning–exit linkage	Year-on-year reduction in exits following support	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of foundational learning, pacing, and reinforcement conditions.
R3	Dropout at key transition points	SDG 4.1, 4.5	Transition shock	Baseline visibility established at key transitions	Year-on-year reduction in transition-related exits	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of sequencing, guidance, and transition support design.
R4	Chronic absenteeism (silent dropout proxy)	SDG 4.1	Hidden disengagement before exit	Baseline visibility established for chronic absenteeism	Year-on-year reduction in persistent absenteeism	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of household constraints, school practices, and early-response mechanisms.
R5	Re-enrolment after dropout	SDG 4.1	Recovery capacity	Baseline visibility established for re-entry pathways	Year-on-year improvement in successful re-enrolment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of pathway design, flexibility, and reintegration support.
R6	Dropout linked to assessment pressure	SDG 4.1	Assessment as exit driver	Baseline visibility established for assessment-linked exits	Year-on-year reduction following assessment adjustment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of assessment design, stakes, and signalling effects.
R7	Dropout linked to economic pressure	SDG 1.2, 4.1	Household constraint effect	Baseline visibility established using economic-exit proxies	Year-on-year reduction with aligned supports	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of welfare linkage, targeting, and timing of support.
R8	Gender-differentiated dropout	SDG 4.5.1	Unequal system impact	Baseline visibility established for gender gaps	Year-on-year narrowing of gaps	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of gendered barriers in learning, safety, and access.

R9	Dropout among learners with disabilities	SDG 4.5.1	Inclusion failure	Baseline visibility established for disability-linked exits	Year-on-year improvement in retention	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of accommodation provision, accessibility, and support services.
R10	Dropout linked to curriculum overload	SDG 4.1	Overload-induced exit	Baseline visibility established using overload proxies	Year-on-year reduction following scope adjustment	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of curriculum feasibility, pacing, and instructional time.
R11	Dropout following school-level instability	SDG 16.6	Governance failure signal	Baseline visibility established for instability–exit linkage	Year-on-year reduction after stabilisation	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of leadership continuity, staffing, and operational stability.
R12	Cohort survival to Grade 10	SDG 4.1	Cumulative retention	Baseline cohort survival calculated	Year-on-year improvement in survival	Persistent underperformance after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of system-wide learning, access, and progression conditions.
S. System Governance, Responsiveness and Implementation Discipline							
S1	Formal acknowledgement of learning shortfall	SDG 4.1, 16.6	Recognition versus denial	Baseline visibility established through official records	Timely acknowledgement and response assignment	Persistent non-acknowledgement after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of institutional incentives and accountability signals.
S2	Timeliness of institutional response	SDG 16.6	Delay as avoidance	Baseline visibility established for response timing	Responses converge toward agreed timeframes	Persistent delay after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of approval processes and coordination constraints.
S3	Clarity of institutional ownership	SDG 16.6	Responsibility diffusion	Baseline visibility established for ownership mapping	Ownership consistently assigned and exercised	Persistent ambiguity after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of mandate overlap and authority gaps.
S4	Unresolved inter-agency deferral	SDG 16.6	Buck-passing	Baseline visibility established for deferral cases	Year-on-year reduction in unresolved deferrals	Persistent deferral after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of coordination mechanisms and dispute resolution capacity.

S5	Correction of curriculum–assessment misalignment	SDG 4.1, 16.6	Interface failure	Baseline visibility established for misalignment	Joint corrective actions implemented	Persistent misalignment after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of institutional incentives and interface governance.
S6	Use of learning evidence in decisions	SDG 16.6	Decorative versus governing data	Baseline visibility established in decision records	Evidence consistently referenced in approvals	Persistent non-use after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of decision rules and enforcement discipline.
S7	Recurrence of identical learning failures	SDG 4.1	System learning capacity	Baseline visibility established for repeated failures	Reduction in recurrence through adaptation	Persistent recurrence after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of response adequacy and adaptation mechanisms.
S8	Activation of cross-agency review	SDG 16.6	Coordination under stress	Baseline visibility established for review triggers	Reviews convened when conditions met	Persistent non-activation after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of escalation rules and authority clarity.
S9	Alignment of mandates with learning benchmarks	SDG 16.6	Structural excuse-making	Baseline visibility established for mandate–benchmark alignment	Progressive alignment of mandates	Persistent misalignment after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of statutory constraints and mandate design.
S10	Time to resolve responsibility disputes	SDG 16.6	Paralysis	Baseline visibility established for dispute duration	Resolution times converge downward	Persistent delay after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of adjudication authority and process clarity.
S11	Consistency of public messaging	SDG 16.7	Blame-shifting behaviour	Baseline visibility established for messaging coherence	Improved consistency during stress periods	Persistent inconsistency after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of communication governance and clearance rules.
S12	Formal exit from ineffective initiatives	SDG 16.6	Ability to stop failure	Baseline visibility established for exit decisions	Exit criteria applied consistently	Persistent continuation after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of political, financial, or reputational lock-in.
S13	Resolution rate of alignment disputes	SDG 16.6	Actual coordination	Baseline visibility established for dispute outcomes	Increased resolution rate	Persistent non-resolution after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of binding authority and enforcement tools.
S14	Protection of reporters	SDG 16.6	Safety to surface problems	Baseline visibility established for protection cases	Remedies delivered without retaliation	Persistent risk after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of protection enforcement and

							supervisory behaviour.
S15	Independent audit coverage	SDG 16.6	Data credibility	Baseline visibility established for audit scope	Expanded audit coverage over time	Persistent audit gaps after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of audit capacity and prioritisation.
S16	Measurement burden on teachers	SDG 4.c	Crowding out teaching	Baseline visibility established for reporting burden	Progressive reduction through consolidation	Persistent burden after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of reporting drivers and duplication sources.
S17	Initiative substitution discipline	SDG 16.6	Layering versus replacement	Baseline visibility established for substitution practice	New initiatives consistently replace old ones	Persistent layering after Phase 2 response applied	Diagnosis of approval discipline and portfolio governance.

Notes:

1. **Indicator availability and proxies**
   Some indicators are not currently produced in existing administrative systems. In Phase 1, these may be established through new lightweight measures (sampling, structured observation, or short pulse instruments) and, where necessary, agreed proxy indicators. Definitions and measurement methods are refined as data quality stabilises.
2. **Heterogeneity and escalation logic**
   Persistent underperformance is interpreted relative to comparable contexts and is used to trigger diagnosis and response in the affected settings. Escalation to system-wide policy, curriculum, assessment, or governance change occurs only where diagnosis indicates systemic drivers or widespread failure across contexts, rather than localised constraints.
3. **Public versus internal indicators**
   Indicators highlighted in green are the public-facing subset used for external reporting in early phases. All other indicators are internal system signals used to guide sequencing, approvals, corrective action, and burden control.

Appendix B: Education system institutions covered by the NLIF

This annex maps the education sector institutions and system components to which the NLIF is intended to apply following formal government adoption and inter-ministerial agreement.

Inclusion in this annex does *not* imply prior consultation, endorsement, or current binding effect on any ministry, division, or agency unless and until such adoption occurs through the appropriate statutory and executive processes. Nor does inclusion imply direct operational responsibility, except where explicitly specified in Chapter 5.

Institutions listed here retain their existing statutory mandates, reporting lines, and approval authorities. The NLIF does not replace these mandates. It governs how decisions taken within those mandates are sequenced, aligned, and reviewed when they affect learning outcomes, instructional time, curriculum scope, assessment signals, progression rules, or system coherence across levels**.**

The purpose of this annex is therefore descriptive and prospective. It reflects the full system architecture that must ultimately be aligned if learning improvement is to be sustained, rather than fragmented across parallel decision streams.

A.1 Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)

- Directorate of Primary Education (DPE)
- National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE)
- District Primary Education Offices (DPEO)
- Assistant District Primary Education Offices (ADPEO)
- Upazila Resource Centres (URC)

Primary education institutions and system elements

- Government Primary Schools (GPS)
- Non-Government Primary Schools (NGPS)
- Newly Nationalised Primary Schools (NNPS)

Primary education programmes and plans

- Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP)
- Upazila Primary Education Plan (UPEP)

Early learning and readiness

- Pre-primary Education (PPE)
- Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD / ECD)
- Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)

A.2 Ministry of Education (MoE)

- Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED)
- Technical and Madrasah Education Division (TMED)

A.3 Directorates and academies under MoE

Secondary and higher education

- Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)
- National Academy for Education Management (NAEM)

Technical and madrasah education

- Directorate of Technical Education (DTE)

- Directorate of Madrasah Education (DME)

A.4 Curriculum, assessment, and regulatory bodies

- National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)
- Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE)
- Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board (BMEB)
- Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB)
- Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority (NTRCA)
- Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC)

A.5 Higher education institutions and authorities

- University Grants Commission (UGC)
- National University (NU)
- Bangladesh Open University (BOU)

A.6 Teacher education and professional development institutions

- Primary Training Institutes (PTI)
- Higher Secondary Teacher Training Institutes (HSTTI)
- Bangladesh Madrasah Teacher Training Institute (BMTTI)

A.7 Data, assessment, and information systems

- Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS)
- Education Management Information System (EMIS)
- Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS)
- Madrasah Education Management Information System (MEMIS)
- National Student Assessment (NSA)
- Learning Assessment of Secondary Institutes (LASI)

A.8 Technical, vocational, and skills institutions (MoE / TMED)

- National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)
- Bangladesh Qualification Framework (BQF)
- National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF)
- Technical Schools and Colleges (TSC)
- Vocational Training Institutes (VTI)
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions

A.9 Identification and system infrastructure

- Education Institute Number (EIN)