



... achievement-oriented society

FROM PAGE 49
for public examinations mostly by memorizing answers to a set of expected questions (8-10) that were repeated in some sequence year after year from a given syllabus in a subject. Was it like that a student who covered and learned 60%-70% of the materials would get a first class and so on? What would be the level of his efforts in attaining that 60% marks? Certainly it was not the highest level as we can all remember from our own cases in the past. It seems there was not an urge to create conditions for a student to put his maximum efforts in studies as it was not demanded by the system. It did force the students to put his best as it was not needed. In public service examinations we also set 50% as the passing mark to qualify & then allow about 45% of the positions to be selected on non-merit considerations.

How do you explain the classification system that used to prevail here until recent changes to letter grades A+, A etc? IBA, Dhaka University, has been using the letter grading system since the start of MBA programme in 1966. Statistics of those graduated from IBA shows that about 50% of the enrolled students failed in the programme unlike other university departments where passing rates were above 95%. Graduates from IBA will vouch for themselves what was the level of their efforts they put to get higher grades in courses. One can guess why IBA graduates excelled in their jobs and moved into higher-level position in many fields in Bangladesh. It seems achievement in a good school, such as IBA, has had links with job performance. Seeds of

achievement motivation are actually planted at educational institutions without doubt.

The Americans did away with the British classification in exam results long time back and introduced the grading system that requires much higher level of efforts to achieve higher grades. The assumption that underlie the grading system is that a candidate will put his maximum effort to obtain say for example A+ (marks 90 and above) in a course in which the margin of error is left at maximum of 10% or less. That means the candidate has learnt to apply the knowledge correctly 90% of the time. This has important implication for performance on the job in whatever field he or she may be engaged. For those obtaining lower grades, B, C, and D the margin of error in learning and hence applying the knowledge in practice are likely to be higher.

Take the cases of MBA/BBA graduates who are executives now. What percentage of error their employers will allow him/her to excel in their job? Who gets promoted rapidly? In this connection it may be mentioned that in 2006 (the) UGC recommended a grading system for all universities in Bangladesh giving A+ for obtaining 80% and above marks, and it was reported in the press that only one out of 79/80 Vice-Chancellors raised objection on the decision. Currently most of the private universities are using a grading scheme in which A+ is awarded to those getting 90% and above marks and UGC is insisting on the use of their recommended scheme.

Grading schemes are not popularity contests as they have serious consequences for national economic growth and they should be based on scientific knowledge. For our executives to become sound decision makers they must have educational background with high achievement motivation and less susceptible to margin of errors in knowledge. It may not be out of place to conjecture why our executives in the public sectors are slow and less effective decision makers.

Seeds of fast growth in the all fields of human endeavours in the USA, Japan and South Korea were laid in their educational systems, and there is merit in trying to follow them since we want to become a high achieving society, not merely a KBS. Of course, huge investment is needed to change the culture of our education system to make it suitable for educating the future generation of executives and leaders to be high achievers rather than simply muddling through as slow folks as has been going on for a long time since the British rule.

Certainly the government has to take steps in that direction and encourage the private sector to come forward with investment in education at all levels to change the society towards a high achieving one. Human intellect has been the foundation for all progress in civilisation and there is perhaps no limit to human potentials if we allow them to flourish through education and research of high quality.

The author is Vice-Chancellor, Northern University, Bangladesh.



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Ali Mansion, 1173/1207 Sadarghat Road, Chittagong, Bangladesh.
Tel: +880-31-616402, 613759, 613282, 637758, Fax: +880-31-610101
E-mail: bsrmo@spnetctg.com, Web: www.bsrmo.com

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