

Shifting Mediums

In Search of the Greener Pasture

Hello

new student

Remember the time at the dinner table when that annoying aunt kept going on about how your medium of education is weak compared to the one her child studies in? We've all been there. This National Curriculum vs. British Curriculum fight has been going on for as long as I can recall. These arguments are essentially pointless of course, because mediums are only secondary influences and it all comes down to you, the individual. But even if one is not better than the other, there's no use denying that the two systems are very different and if you're making the jump from one to another, there'll be issues you'll have to deal with. After all, when you're shifting from a medium, you're not just changing the medium of instruction; you're changing an entire system.

RAYAAN IBTESHAM CHOWDHURY

There are a few different reasons why people make the jump. One very obvious reason is where they'd like to get their higher education from. There is a popular assumption that O and A Level students have an easier time applying abroad than they have coping with the admission tests of the leading universities here, while it's the other way around for students from an SSC/HSC background. This is not say that English medium students don't get into BUET and National Curriculum students don't get into the top universities overseas. There have been plenty of cases where that has happened. The fact that English medium students do have to cope with the HSC syllabus in a short time if they want to appear for admissions test here while Bangla Medium students have to sit for IELTS and get used to the slightly different syllabus to prepare for SATs, gives rise to the belief that these education systems prepare you for different academic futures. This inspires many to make a switch and was the reason that kept coming up among the different people I spoke to.

Priyanta Islam completed his SSC's from St. Joseph Higher Secondary School but then shifted to Mastermind International School for A Levels. The same goes for his St. Joseph classmate Ali Mashraf, who joined Maple Leaf International School. They wanted to study abroad after class 12 and felt that the A Level courses would help them prepare for SATs better. They both feel that they made the right choice a year down the line but do admit the jump was initially pretty hard.

"I had to leave a lot of my old friends behind," Priyanta recalls. "Plus when I first came here I think some students thought less of me because I came from an SSC background. They thought I'd fall behind. But that has changed now."

Mashraf didn't have those issues but says joining clubs helped. "I joined the debate

club right away and that helped me blend in much faster." Lamia Binte Zahid* shifted from Sunnydale to Udayan High School in class 8 and felt alienated for the first few months.

"I was getting these weird looks like I'm from some other planet," she recalls. "It wasn't until we had a group project that they realised I was just another person like them. That helped me fit in."

The issue of feeling alienated was a common theme among the others who made the switch. Maroof Chowdhury joined St. Joseph from

S.FX Greenherald International School and he echoed Lamia, remembering how it took him nearly three months to prove to his classmates that he wasn't thinking badly of them. As a newcomer from "the other medium", you will have to deal with being judged in the initial phase.

As you can see, feeling like an outsider was something they all had to go through. With all the preconceived notions people seem to have about students from "the other medium", it gets hard to show you're just a regular person very much like them. Joining clubs and other activities help and as in the cases of Priyanta, Mashraf and Lamia. They ask anyone making such a change to remain confident. "Believe you can fit in and you will," Lamia says.

But that's just one side of the problem – the social side. We still haven't touched on the academic side. Priyanta felt that the question pattern was more analytical in his A Level courses than he was used to back in his National

Curriculum days. Quite a few of the students who made the National Curriculum to O/A Level switch also noted that the change in language was an issue but not for too long.

"Some worry about the language barrier too much while others underestimate it altogether," says Farhan Rahman, who joined Mastermind from St. Joseph along with Priyanta. "It's useful to be mentally prepared for it. It's going to be an issue if you're used to studying in Bangla all your life. But it's nothing to sweat too much about either. You get used to it in a couple of months or so."

Unlike National Curriculum students moving to the British Curriculum, who for the most part aren't particularly challenged by English Language courses in O Level and can totally avoid English as a subject in A Levels if they want to, those making the

opposite journey aren't so lucky. Two units of Bangla (Literature and Grammar) are compulsory as part of both SSC and HSC courses and in the case of Grammar, the course generally features things former English Medium students would not have come across before. Even though those who were under the Cambridge schools would have studied more Bangla than those from Edexcel schools, it is still very little compared to the sheer size of the Bangla course in the National Curriculum. This proves a hurdle for many who made the switch, and is something anyone who is considering the switch should keep in mind. But then again, it's nothing one can't overcome with a bit of patience, as Rifayet Habib Mugdho*, who joined a National Curriculum school in class 9 found out. "I was horrified of Bangla Grammar at first. But I knew I had joined late so I got the books for class 7 and 8 and read those. Those helped me build up to the stuff we were doing in class 9."

Another common theme observed among everyone interviewed is that not a single person regretted this shift, some even calling it "the best decision they ever took". Despite all the hurdles involved, almost everyone interviewed agreed that the whole process can be rewarding if you know what you want. Shifting mediums can be an easy transition when you're young but later down the line it is sure to be a difficult transition.

You can get an entirely new experience, where you meet different kinds of people and see a new angle to life. It'll also teach you to adapt to newer environments. And if you have a particular goal in sight, it will also offer a lesson in perseverance as many of those we interviewed pointed out. Ali Mashraf thinks that the change made his willpower stronger. "The change was hard but I knew what I wanted and so I just stuck with it. It was a useful lesson."

However if you don't have a goal in sight and get pressurised into shifting, the new environment could result in a downhill experience that could set you back quite a few steps.

*Some names have been changed to maintain privacy.

