

SPOTLIGHT

EXPLORING EDUCATION

ELITA KARIM

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

A couple of weeks ago, right before the HSC and A level results were announced nation wide, Asaduzzaman Noor, the Minister of Cultural Affairs in Bangladesh, spoke at a gathering about how, one must start to think out of the box when it comes to grades, exams, education and also setting up a career. In the speech, which went viral on social media platforms, shared countless times mainly by students and young professionals in the country, Noor mentioned cricketer Shakib Al Hasan and singer Momotaz – also a member of the parliament.

Internationally acclaimed in their respective fields of work, both the aforementioned personalities today earn a lot of money and that too, as Noor mentioned, not directly connected to the conventional idea of a career encouraged by the curriculums taught at schools and colleges.

Come to think of it, it surely is a wonder as to how the age-old curriculum has remained majorly unchanged in the Bangladesh education system. Some of the changes that have occurred in the system in the last many years are the

introduction of board exams in classes 5 (PSC) and 8 (JSC), not to mention the grade system in classes 10 (SSC) and 12 (HSC) as opposed to the percentage system that students used just over a decade ago.

"I remember being ostracised by the elders in the family simply because I would spend all my time painting, especially during my board exams!" laughs Rifat Aziz, a business woman

currently living in Toronto, Canada. Growing up in Dhanmondi, Rifat was a star painter at her school Holy Cross, and would dream of being a professional painter. "As a student I had visited a school in Michigan, USA, where I found students studying hard for an art class, a shop class even a cooking class. I thought them to be nothing more than co-curricular activities, but I was wrong. Each art and home economics class was



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



weighted just like a math or a commerce class was! Parents were concerned about their children's grades in subjects like music and also in calculus. This was a new experience for me, especially because I had come from a traditional system where children had to fix their career goals at the age of 14 or 15 and move to science, commerce and art disciplines accordingly in class 9."

One might wonder why young students are not made to work on general math, science. Social students, civics, languages etc through till the end of high school and not made to choose between the subjects at the tender grade of class 9. "The world has changed now and I believe that all

children till the age of 16 or 17 at least should not stop doing math classes just because they prefer arts over science," says Surobhi Barua, a high school teacher in Chittagong. "Of course, they don't have to go for higher math, but there should be a general math class for all. In fact, I also believe that music classes, pottery, design, digital media should also be added to the main curriculum."

Dr Abdul Maleque, professor at the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Dhaka University feels that this is a burning issue today where the education system is concerned. "What we call vocational subjects or training is available in the primary and secondary curriculum

for sure," he says. "But the major obstacle here is that we find no suitable teacher to teach the subject. Even though the Teacher Training Programme for primary schools is now an 18 month diploma, there is still a gap where theory and practice are concerned within the curriculum," he says. "Just like how O level and A level students have an option to study art and music but do not find a teacher in the country to teach them, students studying in the national curriculum face the same problem."

There are not many teachers who would think of excelling in shop class, wood class, pottery and music or other vocational subjects because,

unfortunately, our society looks down on these careers. The vicious cycle is thus created and never seems to break. "Only if we increase the weightage of the subjects and increase the number of classes to at least 3 times a week from a mere 1, opinions and outlooks would gradually change," adds Dr Maleque.

Today, we want our young ones to become global citizens and they can do so only if they are exposed to a variety of subjects to study and implement, provided that the government helps to create a job markets accordingly. Only then, can we step out of the age-old box and think of new and fresh avenues to explore. ■



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

