

THE SYSTEMATIC OPPRESSION OF ARTS AND COMMERCE IN SCHOOLS

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As a student, it almost seems unbelievable that someone wouldn't be allowed a choice to study the subjects he/she desires. But unfortunately that has turned out to be the reality for most students studying under the National Curriculum of Bangladesh. The existent stigma that "Science is a better discipline to study" has deprioritised Arts and Commerce to the extent that students are actively discouraged from choosing them. The status quo poses a couple of questions: how did we get here, and what is the impact of this view?

"I think it has to do with the prejudice many Bangladeshis hold towards Medical Science and Engineering. To most parents, success equates to you studying under those two subjects and making a profession out of it. And to do that, you have to start with Science," says Nowrin Mahfouz*, who is studying Mechanical Engineering in a university. The rat race of chasing the engineering or medical dream is rooted so deep that many students are coerced into studying Science subjects even when they would rather study other subjects. As a result, it leads to those students doing poorly in Science subjects due to the lack of motivation and interest.



being available in Bangla. Some who choose to shift anyway are compelled to study in Bangla Version and often lag behind.

Saying that this whole mess has been created because of decades of social and cultural norms, and we would have to get to the root of it, would be the easy way out. While that is true, it is also true that the educators and administrators have not done enough to fix these issues. Schools and colleges in the capital city, where the quality of education is supposedly better than everywhere else in the country, are not doing much to improve the situation. Up until 10th grade and SSC, most schools in Dhaka have a significantly low percentage of students in Commerce and the Humanities.

The situation is slightly less dire in college and HSC level, but nowhere near acceptable. Students are actively discouraged from picking Arts and Commerce over Science, but for those with the heart to do so, there isn't nearly enough practical reason that could actually validate that choice.

The effects of such disparities and crass discrimination between disciplines are very serious. We can get a good idea if we looked around. You'll come across many university students who would rather study a course related to science but can't do so because they had a bad year in 8th grade, and the option to later move to Science was taken away from them. If we looked at students at the HSC level, we would find hundreds of students struggling with Physics, Chemistry or Math because their hearts are not in it. While their passions lie in Economics or maybe Sociology, they don't take that path because choosing these subjects would seem like a daft thing to do as per society's and their respective schools' standards. A sizeable number of Business undergraduates in Bangladesh have studied Science in school, and that creates difficulties for them in getting accustomed to their coursework early on in university.

The method used to assign subjects to students in the National Curriculum needs rethinking immediately. It's rigid, discourages change of heart, and sadly fails to get the best out of the considerable talent the youth of our country hold.

*Names were changed at the request of the interviewees.

