



TEACHERS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

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For the purposes of this article, we conducted a survey and got responses from 195 students from public and private universities (57 percent and 43 percent respectively) in different semesters (39.2 percent: 1st to 4th semesters; 44.4 percent: 4th to 8th semesters; 5.8 percent: 9th to 12th semesters; 4.8 percent: over 12 semesters) with 47 percent having a CGPA above 3.5 and 53 percent having a CGPA below 3.5.



WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT TEACHERS
When semesters are about to end, students in many universities are asked to complete faculty evaluations. In some universities, these are mandatory. In others, they are non-existent. Regardless, many students go to social media to vent about their professors and lecturers. Their complaints are many, and such posts often have numerous people sharing their own stories about faculties who in their words are “unfair”, “biased” or “unfriendly”.

In our survey, when asked whether students believed that working hard would always get them an A, 114 of the 193 who answered chose “No, the teacher can sometimes be biased or unfair” with 78 choosing “Yes” and 56 choosing “No, not everyone is capable”.

Again in another question, 45.8 percent (88 out of 192 students) said they got bad grades because “The teacher can sometimes be biased or unfair”.

It is common to see students getting upset over the grades they get. Many seem to believe that if you work hard, it should automatically translate to a good grade. However, students often completely miss the point of assignments or provide irrelevant answers to questions, even on tests that they studied well for. Rote memorisation doesn’t always pay off, and there are test-taking skills one must master if one expects to do well. Students don’t always know what a teacher expects from them, and this sometimes creates confusion and anger as some feel that they deserve better grades.

Do students themselves consider the complaints of other students regarding the validity of the marks they get from their teachers? Our results were inconclusive with half saying “yes” and half saying “no”.

When asked what a good teacher is to them, a majority of the 193 students (167 or 86.5 percent) chose “Creates a positive learning experience”, but 32.6 percent (or 63 students) chose “Is easy-going and not strict when grading”; a small 11.9 percent chose “Doesn’t expect too much from students” and very few chose “Gave you good grades” and “Curves/inflates grades”.

Another one of the expectations that students seem to have is that teachers will inflate grades. In our survey, 47.6 percent of

the students responded that they believe all teachers should inflate grades. Whether these expectations are justified is a matter of debate, but what is clear is that students are often seen in a negative light.

A PORTRAIT OF THE STUDENT AS LAZY, CHILDISH AND UNPRINCIPLED
Ask anyone who has been in a group project, and you’ll see that university students themselves don’t have the best reputation even amongst themselves.

A 2018 article on Star Weekend discusses how Nilkhet’s flourishing business shows just how many students look for readymade academic papers. It becomes hard to root for students when one sees the extent of academic dishonesty. Professors become massively frustrated, and negative formal evaluations and comments can demoralise them, even if it doesn’t directly affect their situation at work.

THE UNSAVOURY ASPECTS OF THE LIVES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DHAKA

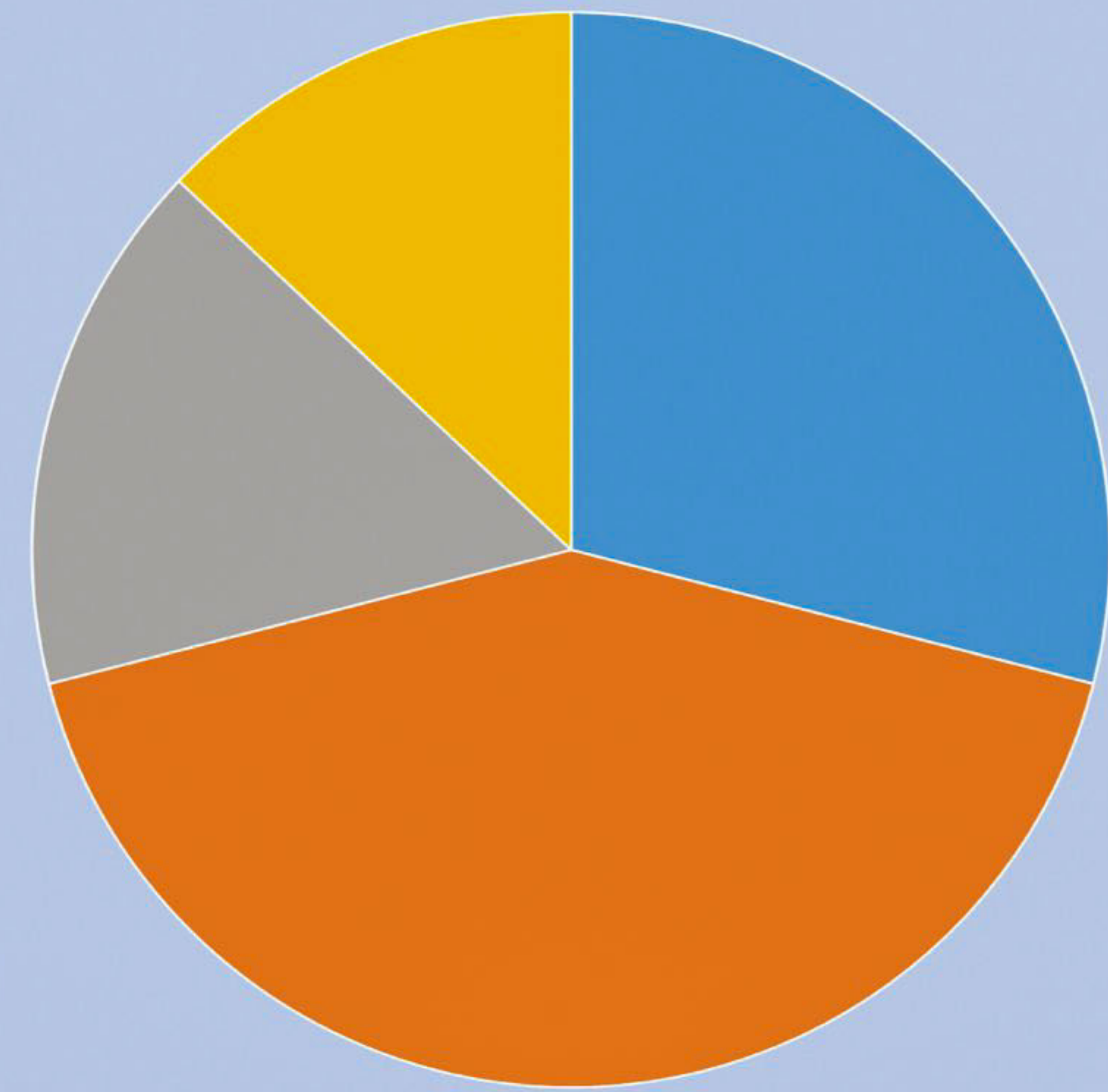
Current university students are products of an education system that is far from ideal. Many have had to sit for not just two, but three major public exams while still in school, causing enormous stress at a young age. Exacerbating this problem is the low level of English proficiency among students. With English being the medium of instruction in all—if not most—universities, students end up having to learn in a language they are not fully comfortable using.

More importantly, this generation of university students not only have a massive workload, they have also started working earlier than those before them. As a result, many have to routinely balance work and studies. The pressure is even greater for those who’ve come from outside Dhaka and now have to adjust to a new city, often away from their friends and families for the first time.

To their credit, students do seem to have some level of awareness. Of the students who answered the question of whether they felt that students were entitled, 43.5 percent said “Yes”, 45.5 percent said “Only some are” and the rest said “No”. To the question of why some students thought they got bad

Do you believe that if a student works hard, they can always get an A?

- Yes
- No, the teacher can sometimes be biased or unfair
- No, not everyone is capable
- No, not everyone is capable; No, the teacher can sometimes be biased or unfair



grades in a course, a majority (114) chose “Didn’t study enough for it”. Eighty-eight students (45.8 percent) chose “The faculty can sometimes be biased or unfair”, 20 students (10.4 percent) chose “The faculty didn’t curve/inflate my grades” and 59 students (30.7 percent) chose “I struggled but eventually got a desirable grade”.

However, what must be acknowledged is that students don’t always know what’s best for them. A professor whose class they dread now might actually be the class that benefits them the most in the future. **EMOTIONS, INEXPERIENCE, AND OTHER PROBLEMS OF SETS**
Criticism of student evaluation of teaching isn’t new. How can students decide what quality education is or judge a teacher’s competence when experts cannot say for

certain what a good education is? In an article by Henry A. Hornstein, the various problems with students evaluating teachers are discussed. He writes, “Students can reliably speak about *their experience* in a course. However, they cannot evaluate outside their experience, i.e. how can they access course pedagogy? By what valid criteria are students able to determine how “knowledgeable” an instructor is about his/her subject area?”

In addition, there is an assumption that the students evaluating will be doing it objectively. Tasnova Humaira, Lecturer at BRAC University, says, “Students may sometimes evaluate negatively because of one bad experience with the teacher, or might evaluate without giving any real thought to the process.”

She adds, “Student feedback is essential in creating an effective classroom environment where students can genuinely reflect on previous knowledge, learn new information and question different ideas without any anxiety.”

Similarly, in a 2010 article in The Daily Star, Abul Bayes, a professor at Jahangirnagar University, defends student evaluations of teachers and writes, “Only an accountable person is a respectable person.”

SOLUTION
A major problem seems to be the lack of transparency and communication between professors and students. When asked what practices teachers engage in that negatively affects students, most chose “Being impatient and unfriendly”. However, 83 students chose “Not showing exam scripts and assignments”, 121 chose “Not explaining to a student why marks were cut” and 38 chose “Losing exam scripts, assignments, and homework”. In turn, 58.3 percent of students said they did not feel that teachers are overworked.

It becomes obvious when looking at this information—both parties could clearly benefit from more discussion. This is further supported by the answers we got to the question of what a good teacher is to a student and the second most chosen option with 78.2 percent selecting “Openly communicates with students about grades, topics discussed in class, etc”.

Students have a right to question their professors and lecturers when they get a grade they feel is wrong. They have a right to know what their mistakes are. And so it is unfair to immediately label all students with complaints as immature and unwilling to take responsibility for their actions. While it is true that many want as easy a workload as possible, many genuinely have difficulty understanding some things. Overall, listening to students might make the journey smoother, both for the university and the students. Student evaluations of teachers might be one of the important ways in which institutions listen to what students have to say.

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