

Are school closures difficult on children from authoritarian households?

FATIN HAMAMA

Growing up, I was that friend in the group who rarely showed up at hangouts, always had a super-early curfew, and had to keep notifying their parents about their whereabouts every hour.

Sad as it may sound, one of the very few instances of respite from my parents’ constant agency over every trivial thing I did was the time I got to spend with my friends during school hours and tutorial classes.

The very same scenario seemed to be a reality for a lot of my peers. While the restrictions did slacken for me after a certain period of time, it didn’t happen until after the first lockdown in 2020. Hence, having experienced being cut off from the barest minimum scope of real-life socialisation back then myself, I wonder whether kids hailing from overly restrictive households are actually worse off when educational institutions are closed.

Over the past couple of months, most schools had reopened, only to return to online classes again. Though schools are resuming in-person classes soon, there is always a chance for another closure if the situation worsens again. With closures come the immediate hiccups of going back to seeing and interacting with your



PHOTO: STAR

friends mostly through a blurry webcam during a Zoom class.

While it is crucial that we stay safe and indoors, it is still possible to find ways of socialising face-to-face without violating social distancing and safety protocols. Unfortunately, for a lot of parents who have a history of being unreasonably strict

about their children going out and such (even during normal times), along with the absence of physical academic classes, only translates to an excuse for absolute confinement within the house.

For example, interacting with friends that live in the buildings around from our balconies, meeting up in small num-

bers for an afternoon of refreshment on someone’s empty rooftop, etc. However, teenagers having access to these small instances of privilege also depend on how supportive their household is.

While the unjustifiable constraints many young adults, especially girls, face over their agency of movement are somewhat tolerable when we get to stay out of the confines of our house during school hours or the extra classes afterwards, having at least some semblance of the said outlets taken away entirely, becomes simply unbearable. It often worsens mental health issues for numerous teenagers, which in turn takes a heavy toll on their academics and social life. This almost always leads to frequent conflicts with the parents as well, which causes another plethora of issues.

Being cautious of frequent outings and physical interactions according to coronavirus infection rates is always a good idea, but it is high time parents understood that being cautious does not have to be synonymous with isolation. It is hard enough to live within the lines drawn by authoritarian guardian figures in our youth, even without a raging pandemic and ridiculously slim scopes of maintaining a proper social life.

Repeat after me: Thesis anxiety is real

PROTEETI AHMED

POV: You’re panicking while writing your undergraduate research thesis. Well, trying to write your thesis.

What you’re actually doing is staring at a mostly blank Word document. A working title is up there, but that’s about it.

Speaking of panicking, why is it that words that end with a consonant preceded by a single vowel, double the consonant in their continuous tense, but in case of the word “panic” the English language was all, “Aight, Imma add a whole different letter, namely ‘k’, m’kay? Panic to panicking, you don’t know man it’s just weird to you.”

Also, did you know we get the English word “panic” from the ancient Greek god named Pan? No, nope. You’re writing a thesis. DON’T GET DISTRACTED!

Sigh. So, this is how it’s going to be, huh? In that case, here are five ways to control your anxiety... But wait, the anxiety will still prevail. There’s no way out, and that’s just a sad reality.

Instead, here are some of the many different ways that writing an academic paper can get to you.

Thinking that you won’t graduate

This is harmful thinking when you know you have to graduate. Well, you don’t have to graduate, but being a dropout is not an option either. So you’re, what, trying to achieve the impossible? For once, please don’t.

Singing “I’m all alone” like Donkey does in Shrek.

A couple of things to unpack here, the first of which is: Why? Also, you are not alone. As in, quite literally. There are Quora threads dedicated to anxiety induced by academic paper writing and deadlines. Trust me, I googled them.

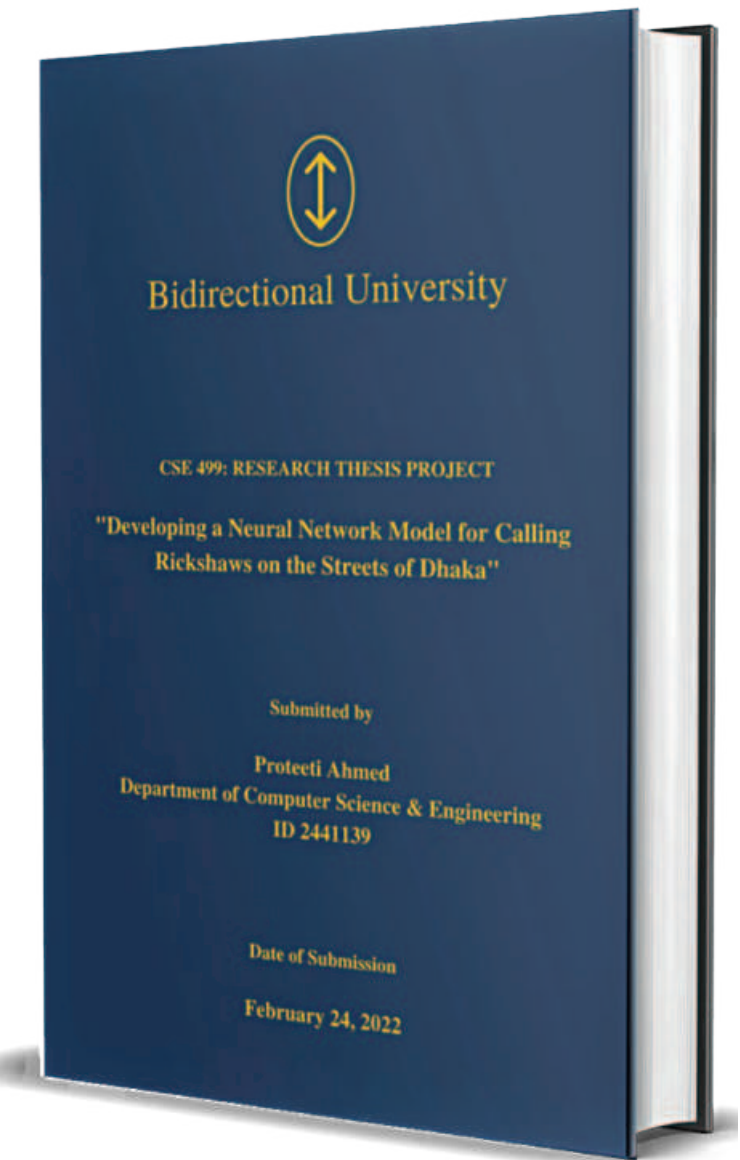
Bullet points, spreadsheets, whiteboards

All the planning in the world only goes so far, but they’re not completely useless. That heavily detailed colour-coded journal that you occasionally take out to flip through and cry – yeah, you know the one – rather than just using it to reminisce the days way back when you were productive, try to tick off one box at a time. And if you find that you can’t do that, you break those boxes down into more accomplishable tasks. Because, as someone once (probably) said, the first step towards taking a shower is putting a foot inside the bathroom.

In conclusion, maybe you can write your thesis, maybe your thesis will write itself. Maybe you really are that far gone. Maybe it’s Maybelline. Whichever the case is, you know that writing this paper is not a sprint, it’s a marathon, and each individual’s experience is valid. But you also know that you shouldn’t do stuff like going AWOL on your thesis supervisor, or not getting in touch with your support system when you should.

Just a few things to get right, and the rest is in the bag. Now go forth, scholar, and conquer.

Proteeti Ahmed is trying. Share life stories that also follow Murphy’s Law with her at proteeti.14@gmail.com



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD



ALL THE REASONS WE LEAVE

AYSHA ZAHEEN & NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

“Of course, higher education played a major role in my decision to move here and I don’t plan on going back anytime soon. I acknowledge that every nation has its issues, including the first-world country I currently live in. But in comparison, I see a better scope for myself to build a life here than in Bangladesh,” states Tasneem Tahrin, a 25-year-old graduate student of University of Toronto, in Canada.

The desire to leave the country is becoming more and more common among young Bangladeshis. Despite living in a rapidly growing economy, which by definition should entail better living standards, why is the youth so eager to leave their homeland behind?

It seems as though a large proportion of Bangladeshi citizens are dissatisfied with their lives here, particularly young people.

To further explore this phenomenon, we surveyed 240 youths within the age range of 17 to 28. We asked questions regarding how they feel about living in Bangladesh, if they have plans to move abroad, what serves as reasons behind the said plans, and how their families feel about it.

Over 75 percent of the participants said that they would rather live abroad, the most common reasons being seeking a better standard of living, freedom, and the unsafe environment here.

The quality of education in Bangladesh has always been a pressing issue for people, many choosing to go abroad to ensure a better quality of education for themselves, and consequently, for their families. Dissatisfaction with the quality of education was evident when asked to explain why the respondents or their families plan a future away from here.

Moreover, 82 percent of the respondents who expressed the desire to move abroad plan to do so by opting for foreign higher education.

Another issue that came up alongside education and safety, is lifestyle. Many respondents expressed their and their parents’ concerns about the living standards in Bangladesh. Due to over-population and unplanned rapid urbanisation, the population is deprived of fresh air, recreational space, and greenery. The lifestyle in the cities here is increasingly becoming highly pedestrian and uninspiring day by day.

“I feel like the environment around us is very constricting and suffocating and it is natural for a creative individual to feel like their creative pursuits, thoughts, and processes are being inhibited here,” says Farhan Ajmaine, a 23-year-old junior at

Brac University.

In 2021, Dhaka was ranked as the seventh most dangerous city according to the Safe Cities Index, a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit. Seventy-one percent of our 134 female respondents have stated safety concerns to be a major contributing factor to them wanting to leave. However, certain societal expectations and prejudices make migrating abroad more challenging for women than men.

Maliha Tabassum, a 22-year-old senior at Brac University describes a predicament of the same sort when asked of social and

now, especially due to social media and the voice it has given everyone.

“I wanted to move abroad for quality education. However, it turned out that there’s more to it. I want to have the choice to live how I want and explore career options. It’s suffocating for me that I barely have such liberties in Bangladesh. Secondly, I am the kind of person who loves multiculturalism and would prefer to go to a country that has such practice,” explains Lenah Mehzabin Prieta, 22, a senior at East West University.

She adds, “I had to work really hard to convince my parents that marriage



familial barriers she might be facing. “I do want to go abroad for higher studies. Also, the safety of women in recent years and the years to come is very questionable in our country. One of the constraints that hold me back is my marital status. My family believes that it is better to have a partner than to go alone,” she comments.

The generational gap between the youth and the elderly has become more discernible in recent times. Many feel that the social institutions and family backwardness, alongside other incompatibilities, hold them back here. They believe that they will be able to exercise their rights and choices freely in a different country than here. The incompatibility is exacerbated by the religious radicalisation that is observed in present times. The lack of political stability also serves as one of the driving factors for people’s reluctance to plan out their lives here.

Much of the youth have overcome certain taboos and stigmas and have learned to speak for themselves, against dated notions and ideas. The discrepancy in mindsets and opinions between the older generation and the youth is noticeable

should not be a prerequisite for me. I had to cancel my plans for undergraduate studies because of their disapproval. They still prefer marriage for me, but no longer force it. So yes, being a woman made it more difficult for me.”

However, for some people, leaving behind their families and the place they grew up in is too big of a sacrifice to make despite the difficulties Bangladesh may present. This is apparent from our survey, in which 56 percent of the respondents who said they do not want to leave, stated being close to family as the main reason for it.

“Prioritising family is the primary reason I want to stay here, and I want to take full responsibility for them. Moreover, I have a strong emotional attachment to this place and would like to give back to the society that nurtured me,” says Mumnoon Zaver, 25, a trainee engineer at Digital Powerhouse.

“There are a lot of issues here, but for me, it’s all about adjusting. We all suffer more or less because of it, but I’m still hopeful. I believe we are progressing towards betterment and the hardships

that come with living here will slowly be resolved,” he adds.

Bangladesh is infamous for its “brain drain” index, which stood at 7.6 in 2019, much higher than the average of 5.5 according to data from Fund for Peace. Dhaka alone has a population of over 20 million and has been ranked as the fourth least liveable city in the world by the Global Liveability Index 2021.

Upwards of 400,000 people move to Dhaka every year, many of whom migrate for higher education or in hopes of earning a livelihood given the lack of opportunities in their hometowns. However, due to mass migration, the job market in Dhaka has also become saturated. Young undergraduates are suffering the consequences of overpopulation in the form of lack of job opportunities. An undergraduate degree no longer guarantees a rewarding job. As a matter of fact, many employers now look for experience and a master’s degree for entry level jobs, causing further discouragement among fresh graduates.

“It’s difficult to land a good job here without networks, especially for undergraduates. Employers have high expectations from potential candidates in terms of qualifications, but they don’t offer high enough salaries in exchange for those qualifications. Many organisations have even increased working hours and expect employees to work six days a week. Such unfair changes go unchecked and the burden falls on fresh graduates,” says Salma Fariha, 24, a recent graduate of North South University.

Bangladeshi youth, those who want to, leave the country for a combination of reasons such as better living standards, security reasons, cultural disagreements, quality education or job opportunities. It is evident that the country’s sole focus on economic growth has come with grave repercussions, compelling its young residents to want to leave.

These responses beg the question, can Bangladesh truly prosper without tending to the plethora of problems the youth are facing?

References

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2. The Guardian (December 1, 2015). Dhaka: the city where climate refugees are already a reality.

Aysha’s blocks exist longer than summers in Bangladesh. Give her solutions at zaheenaysha10@gmail.com

Nuzhat zones out every ten minutes. Tell her to snap out of it at nuzhatchowdhury07@gmail.com