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Our schools need better facilities, now

HRISHIK ROY

I remember once walking out of my school's administrative office with a disappointing look on my face. The school administration had just rejected our plea to hire a coach for our school's debate club. This was not surprising.

To be fair, this is not something which happens in my school only, but most school authorities across the country seem to be extremely reluctant to invest in or arrange any facilities beyond the ones required minimum for academia.

Often, the computer labs of schools are not particularly well-equipped with the necessary facilities for students to use. To add salt to the wound, the staff in charge of these laboratories are often the least tech savvy people one can find, making it extremely hard for students to gain any useful insight about computing and technology.

The issues regarding the lack of facilities extend to other areas such as a lack of playing fields, sporting equipment, and adequate and diverse books in school libraries. This lack of facilities begs me to ask the question: why are most schools so tight-fisted when it comes to making room for any facility above the threshold of the bare minimum?

There is a very strong correlation between the extent of facilities offered by a school and the amount of funding that it receives in the form of tuition fees and subsidies. An expensive school in Dhaka teaching foreign curriculum might have a swimming pool for students to learn swimming. On the other hand, some schools do not even get a coach for their debate team.

This can be further illustrated using the fact that public schools, which receive subsidies or extract higher amounts of tuition from their students, outperform non-subsidised public schools in terms of the facilities they offer. A quick comparison between the facilities offered by public schools in Dhaka, which charge a higher tuition, and other public schools in major cities across the country exposes this stark contrast.

Additionally, this means that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often attend schools with less funding, are left behind compared to their counterparts from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Students from affluent backgrounds can easily access resources such as books, sporting equipment, or computers regardless of whether their school provides it for them. Therefore, this exacerbates class divisions in the long run.

The main solutions to this problem are very self-evident – increasing funding for schools in the form of subsidies as well as monitoring whether the school authorities are properly using the funds to provide better facilities for their students.

A proper education not only involves academics, but also includes a healthy balance of sports, fine arts, and performing arts among other things. Our schools need to have such facilities present for students to properly utilise.

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In the name of dress codes

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Lakshmipur madrasa teacher Manjurul Kabir Manzur made headlines in October 2021 when he was sent to jail for cutting hair of six students. Many similar incidents are reported across the country, where educators in question go as far as physically assaulting and publicly humiliating their students for failing to maintain a look "appropriate" for school.

Schools claim that dress codes foster equality and inclusivity, dissolving differences in race and social classes for example, and professionalism because homogeneity in pupils' appearances means that they are not distracted by each other's looks. However, very few people can explain exactly what professionalism students learn when their teachers grab them by their collars to cut their hair or where the inclusivity is in asking curvier girls to ditch skirts and shirts in favour of salwar kameez to hide their bodies better.

Rules about students' appearances such as no nail polish, henna, or loose hairstyles for girls and no long hair for boys are valued as unbreakable laws in our educational institutions. Acts of violence perpetuated by teachers for breaking these rules should make us wonder how strongly these rules should be enforced and more importantly, if they should exist at all.

Extreme measures to police students' appearance promotes values that no institution, especially educational ones, should promote: suppression of individuality and privacy.

Tazreen Jahan Bari, recent graduate of

Bangladesh University of Professionals, recalls, "There was a time in my school when girls had to take their socks off to show if they had nail polish on their toenails."

While this is problematic on its own, we should also recognise that this invasion of privacy contributes to the continuation of very toxic practices in our society like body shaming, gendering fashion, and sexualisation of underage girls.

It gets especially worrisome when this desire to control what students wear branch out of the classroom. I still remember how a supervisor at my school once called in one of my friends, in the middle of class, just to berate her for 15 minutes because he had seen her out with her mother the evening before when she had committed the cardinal sin of wearing jeans.

Standardised dressing in schools does not have to be so problematic, in my opinion. The idea of all students being on a level ground is something anyone can get behind. It is only when there is absolutely no room for students' individual identities and independence that dress codes become unwelcome and ironically, discriminating.

Ultimately, we must remember why we need education in the first place: to be free and let free. When it comes to fighting for freedom in our overly reactionary education system, I cannot think of any better place to start than our own bodies.

Fabiha is secretly a Lannister noblewoman and a Slytherin alum. Pledge your allegiance and soul to her at afifafabiha01@gmail.com



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