



ECHOES BY
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Adapting students from diverse academic backgrounds

I Children in Bangladesh start education at playgroup, kindergarten or Class 1 under the National Curriculum and Textbook Board; others start under the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. These different streams of education have different medium, syllabi, and curricula.

The pre-university assessments include the SSC and HSC, under different boards, and the O and A Levels, under Edexcel and Cambridge. The pre-university education of Bangladesh is as varied as the colours of a rainbow.

Bangladesh is not the only country where the education system is segregated. The UK has faith schools, state schools, public schools that are actually private, and boarding schools. The challenge lies when all the fountains, streams, and rivers of education meet at the sea – the tertiary level – generally known as the university.

Universities in Bangladesh are also segregated into several groups. First, there are the general and technical public universities. Secondly, the institutes that fall under the National University. Third, the Bangladesh Open University. And finally, the private universities.

Once students pass the admission exams to pursue tertiary education, the next challenge for the educators is how to address students who come from different



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pre-university backgrounds. Or is it not that much of a problem?

II The students are separated into two streams. They are either only SSC-HSC, or a mix of SSC-HSC and O-A Levels. There is probably no university that has one stream only. When the set of intakes are from one stream only, it is perhaps easy for educators to address students and build them up in their first year. The challenge arises when

there is a mix of SSC-HSC and O-A Levels.

As I teach Economics at university, I can tell, this is a challenge for the department. Let me explain.

Pre-university Economics is more advanced in O-A Levels. When we have a set of first-year students from mixed backgrounds, it becomes a challenge to streamline the two sets of students. One would expect private universities to face this challenge more since most of the O-A Level students are absorbed in this cate-

gory. However, in public universities, we are observing a growing mixture of both streams in recent times.

Private universities have a different challenge when it comes to elementary Economics courses. First, there is the mix of students. Second, elementary Economics is taught at the same time in departments and disciplines outside Economics. Third, almost all private universities have a maximum class size for each section, meaning the same course will probably be taught by several teachers. Finally, the semester for an elementary course is too short. This seriously challenges quality delivery.

III Helping first year students from diverse academic and other backgrounds adapt is a challenge for all universities. If this is not addressed, then chances are high for two things to happen. One group becomes disenchanted. Those who come from adaptable backgrounds make a head-on start, which sadly can contribute to inequality. Universities have a role to play as parents. Keeping this in mind is of utmost importance for them.

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Our schools deserve better leadership

School boards – how good of a job are they doing?

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Back in November 2017, an announcement by the ruling political party's student body alarmed educationists and parents of school kids around the country. The announcement, made after an "emergency" meeting of its central executive body, instructed its organisational units to set up committees at secondary schools.

The idea was dismissed soon after, with reasoning that students were already burdened with academic workload, and the need for such committees within schools would only weigh school children down with "politics".

While that may have been the end of that saga, it seems that politics within schools never went away entirely. While authorised political activities among school students doesn't exist, one can easily get a whiff of it going on in the background, especially among those running the schools.

Local government or political representatives have almost always been associated with school boards in our country, especially government schools. In a way,

having local representatives within these boards is a good thing, because if anything, these representatives can oversee school activities and monitor overall performance and standards. However, the case has been quite different in our country.

In 2017, a school ground in Narayanganj was used as the wedding venue of the son of one of the school's committee members. All the preparations were being taken during school hours, when students were inside the classroom. Needless to say, the preparations were disrupting the lessons, but who could the students turn to for help when their school's so-called leader was the one causing the chaos?

A similar incident happened in Dhaka when the principal of a renowned school was found guilty of arranging a cattle market on the school grounds. The principal was also facing investigation over several other issues, including admission irregularities, and was caught in the act of verbally abusing governing body members as well as talking about their political influence in the same conversation.

Despite being isolated incidents, they

all have one thing in common. It is always an authority figure in the background who is pulling the strings, and that too at the school and its students' expense. Showcasing their political influence is another thing these school leaders do at times to further benefit themselves, and their own interests.

Local government representatives being on school boards is never a bad thing. However, it ultimately comes down to these members and what they do with the power vested in them by the people of the school community.

Schools in other countries see their board members striving to establish the school's visions and goals during their time in office. However, it seems that the ones in control of our schools almost always gun for personal gains over the collective interest of the school, often creating a hostile political environment within, affecting teachers and students alike.

And at the end of the day, education is the one to suffer from such mismanagement and lack of able leadership.



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