

The grief of losing a skill

NOUSHIN NURI

When I find myself sliding into the endless pit called writer's block, I turn to prolific writers. One of them is Emily Dickinson, who left an oeuvre of 2500 poem manuscripts — most of it written without any incentive of getting published.

Perhaps to compensate for the perceived impossibility of publishing, women during those times used to hand-sew their poems into thin bundles called fascicles. Emily did so, too. But at one stage, she writes,

*Don't put up my thread and needle —
I'll begin to sew
When the birds begin to whistle —
Better stitches — so —*

Dickinson grapples with the fear of losing her stitches, possibly due to her eye disease that restricted working up close. She feared a distance with her thread and needle.

Undoubtedly, her most passionate art was poetry and sewing, perhaps a secondary hobby that aided the preservation of her poems. Yet, an autobiographical reading of this poem reveals her fear of losing this skill and the ensuing torment that led her to hem words into verses of sorrow.

My aunt too had put down her thread and needle. Anyone visiting her house can't help admiring the paint-

ings lining her living room walls. They are beautiful from a distance but only upon closer inspection with squinted eyes does one make this surprising discovery — the vivid sceneries are not creations of brushstrokes. My aunt had the talent of capturing intricate vistas of flowers, butterflies, diverse foliage, honey bees, vines, and much more with minute stitches of thread and needle on canvas.

Whenever I visit her, I take one of those artworks and brush the tips of my fingers through the textured stitches of decade-old thread. My aunt brims with pride as I do. But I also trace the shadow of a wistful smile reminiscent of the youthful leisurely days. When my first cousin was born, she was busy embracing motherhood and couldn't even tell when her craft left without saying so much as a goodbye.

As my hands slowly sweep the stitches, I feel tactilely connected to my own sense of loss. I remember the textured rubber surface of a basketball against my palms. It brings back the afternoons we spent throwing the ball from different points, polishing our lay-up shots and fine tuning the force of our chest passes. When the heat of the game had worn us out, we sat with legs stretched and gulped lemonade with basil seeds. The view in front of us featuring the

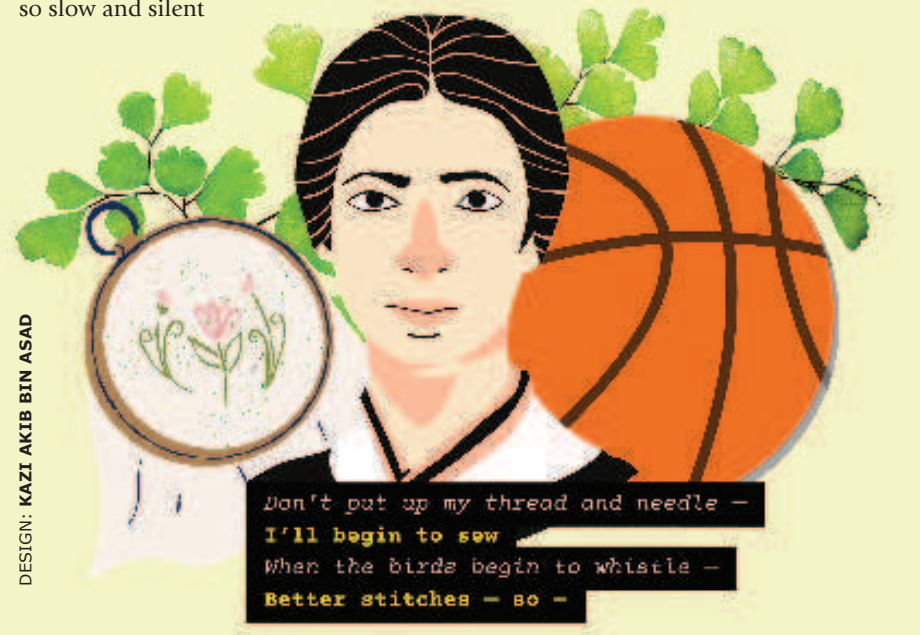
setting sun — an orange ball sliding down the hoop.

Nowadays, I see my passing out of cadet college as the symbolic sunset of my journey with basketball. With the benefit of hindsight, I can find a dozen excuses to explain away my insincerity towards holding on to the game. But none of it fills the nostalgic hollowness I feel when I come across an Instagram story of the lofty hoop hanging against the sunset sky.

Some departures are so slow and silent

that we don't even notice that it's taking place. The busy days prolong. We put down our thread and needle. And one summer afternoon, we realise the pastimes we once took pride in have become glass-enclosed relics in the museums we carry in our heads.

Noushin Nuri is an early bird fighting the world to maintain her sleep schedule. Reach her at @noushinnuri on Instagram.



DESIGN: KAZI AKTIB BIN ASAD

OPINION

Everything wrong with the HSC syllabus this year

NADEEMAHAFROSE MONDOL

The HSC exam is only a few months away and the government has already published a curtailed syllabus for this year's pandemic-affected students. Being a candidate myself, I can't help but point out some serious issues regarding short syllabus.

Although the intention of publishing the new syllabus was to reduce the workload for students, it didn't end up being as convenient as it was supposed to be.

The first problem I observed while going through the short syllabus was selection of the topics. Being a Science student, I noticed that I had to put the same effort in finishing the short syllabus of every subject as I would have to in finishing the whole book. The reason being, there are some chapters that are left out but are deeply related to the topics that are included in the syllabus. For example, Newtonian dynamics isn't included in the shortened syllabus for Physics, but Newtonian mechanics is. With the whole concept of Newtonian mechanics based on the laws of dynamics, it did not quite make sense to exclude one chapter and include another.

Looking at it from a different angle,



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

there are some essential topics of every subject that a student has to have some knowledge about. For instance, safe use of laboratory equipment is an inevitable topic for a student willing to study Chemistry. This chapter also includes different types of reagents and their uses. But this is not included in the short syllabus, meaning that the students will move forward with vague ideas about the risk

factors and the necessary precautions at a Chemistry lab.

In the case of Biology, the chapter on reproduction is excluded, which was the only chapter that had information about sex education. Many teachers are already uncomfortable enlightening students about this topic; excluding this from the syllabus has taken the concept of having problematic ideas towards sex education

one step further.

Flaws like these in this year's syllabus are creating hindrances for students trying to prepare efficiently for their exams.

There is confusion over what and what not to study because it's still unclear if university admission tests will be held based on the shortened syllabus or not. Most importantly, their knowledge about every subject remains ambiguous. On top of that, the exclusion of ICT subject from the short syllabus seems hysterical in this technological era.

I asked some of my friends who are from the Business Studies and Arts group about their syllabus and they have similar problems and dilemmas regarding this. One of them also referred to the fact that teachers tend to repeat questions from previous years' exams. With a shortened syllabus, it's difficult to surmise if those patterns will hold this year. All of these issues are causing more stress in taking preparation and the short syllabus doesn't end up being helpful at all.

Nadeemah always wraps her head around the thought of what she's going to eat next and thinks that the glass at her bedside table is half-full. Say hi at: nadeemahafrose13@gmail.com

Too many BBA graduates?

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY & SYEDA ERUM NOOR

For a long time, many were under the impression that a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) program was a safe haven for anyone who didn't quite know what else to do. Due to its popularity and the growing rate at which the universities are churning out graduates every few months, we now wonder, could there possibly be too many BBA graduates?

In universities across the country, undergraduate courses in the BBA curriculum often have the highest number of sections and even then, people enrolled in the program struggle to register for their desired courses due to lack of availability, signifying the growing number of people opting for a BBA degree.

While there may have been some truth to the assumptions behind why some students ended up opting for BBA, in recent years, many are going into this knowing what they want.

"I was always passionate about accounting," says Anna Alam Daniala, a BRAC University graduate, currently a trainee at Data Path Limited. "Ever since school, I was decent at math and I decided right then that finance and accounting was the way to go."

The same is true for Shahrear Ahmed, International University, Bangladesh graduate and HR & Admin Executive of Asian Automotive Limited. "It had always been my dream to work in the corporate world. BBA was the first step towards that," he says.

Gone are the days of ambiguous teens wandering into university without a plan or programs chosen by parents rather than students. Right?

"I honestly have no idea why I did it," laughs Rehnuma Ahmed, a student at North South University (NSU). "I had no intention of studying BBA. I'm passionate about teaching and after my internship, I quickly abandoned that route."

Regardless of how students ended up there, when we talk about the transition from student life to work life, our graduates had a lot to say about the matter. As always, it is important that we take the time to assess our education system and whether they're preparing us for the real world.

"It was a massive setback," explains Bushra Tabassum, a recent NSU graduate. "I had to learn most of everything from scratch. Sure, there were some similarities in the terminology but I was woefully unprepared."

While some agree that this is the case, Shahjada Aswad, a recent Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka (IBA, DU) graduate, has slightly varying opinions.

"I felt somewhat prepared," Shahjada explains. "While the BBA curriculum did help me, I think it was the ECA, such as business competitions, that did a better job of preparing me to enter the workforce."

Human Resource (HR) executives

have had similar thoughts while recruiting and training the newly hired business graduates.

"We had to train the new hires from scratch. We held seminars and gave personal training for their work as well as for getting used to the office culture. However, some of the graduates did not possess the skills they should have acquired by the time they graduate such as communication, teamwork, and leadership," says Md Sadman Uzzaman, an HR personnel and a BBA graduate himself.

"A business degree can be valuable only if the student receives proper training alongside the theories taught in class. It also depends on your pro-



fessor's teaching style, as well as what you do with the guidance given to you," he adds.

There is a growing number of organisations that give preference to engineers over BBA graduates for positions that require a bachelor's degree. At this rate, a BBA degree might become obsolete if not updated to meet the requirements of the workforce.

When asked about this phenomenon, Sadman says, "Technology has now become an integral part of business. A lot of BBA graduates lack 'tech fluency', giving engineers who do have the knowledge and the skills to implement that knowledge an edge over those who don't."

Earlier this year, Education Minister Dr Dipu Moni stated that students can learn a lot through diploma and certificate courses.

However, the job market's practices do not align with the statements mentioned above. Nearly all office jobs require a Bachelor's degree for application. As a matter of fact, many organisations even expect a Master's degree for entry-level jobs, making it the next logical step for undergraduates entering the corporate world. This trend is an ominous sign of an abundance of unemployed or unhappy MBA graduates in the country in the near future.

With the collective concern for the BBA program and what it lacks, students and graduates had a lot to say when asked what they would change to

make it better.

"Cut down on the GEDs for sure. We waste so much of our time on courses that don't add any real value to the knowledge we need," comments Rehnuma.

Others suggested that these unnecessary courses should be replaced with more useful courses, such as more structured datasheet and presentation courses and the development of soft skills.

"We lack in-depth technical skills in areas such as statistics, analytics, coding, and operating software. Other soft skills such as teamwork and people skills are far more handy than theoretical knowledge," lists Anna.

application and real-life experience as opposed to theory.

With all this dissatisfaction with the program among students, we then bring our attention to the next challenge they have to face — endless competition.

There is no question that with this influx of students flowing into the workplace, finding jobs is becoming increasingly difficult. When asked about the experience with competition when hunting for internships and jobs, we hear some mixed opinions.

"Here, it feels almost impossible without a reference," explains Rehnuma, further expanding on Bushra's statements of a toxic workforce. In an industry where connections are often more useful in getting a job than skills, one has to wonder what that means for students and the dangerous world of politics they're stepping into.

While most agree that it took some hunting before they were able to get a job, some disagree. Wasema Rahman Sreya, recent IBA, DU graduate, says that while she isn't currently working, she didn't find it very difficult to get a job.

"While there is a lot of competition, in a country like Bangladesh, with its population, I think that would be the case for any field," she comments.

It's clear that a certain level of dissatisfaction exists with the BBA programs offered in the country. Lack of preparedness for the workforce, an outdated curriculum and shortage of job opportunities were some of the major concerns of business students and graduates.

With the growing number of BBA graduates in the country, we must ask ourselves if this path truly benefits the students, or only the institutions that offer the program.

Reference

The Daily Star (February 25, 2017). *Achieving our higher education targets.*

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