



## ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

# When money matters most

**“Apart from the Tk 200,000 admission fee, I was required to pay Tk 25,000 monthly tuition fees. There are various other expenditures such as fees for coaching centres and books and stationery products.”**

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

English medium schools have been charging exorbitant admission and tuition fees in the absence of any guidelines and monitoring, making it a constant struggle for guardians, especially those belonging to the middle-income bracket, to continue their children's education.

The government does not have any control on these schools and it has not taken any initiative yet to regulate these privately owned educational institutions. And the indifference of authorities concerned leaves the scope for the schools to charge at whims.

“My son's school is increasing fees every year while the costs for books and stationeries are also going up simultaneously. But it seems there's no authority to look into these issues,” said Ahmed Raihan, whose son studies at an English medium school in Dhanmondi.

The Covid pandemic made the situation even more difficult for many parents with some having to discontinue their children's education in such schools as they cannot bear the ever-increasing cost of education.

Take Sadman (not his real name) for an instance. He had to discontinue his school in his eighth grade in late 2020 due to increasing expenses.

the students have to purchase books, school uniforms and all stationery products required in a year from specific shops designated by the school authorities. This also costs them a huge amount of money per academic year depending on the class they study in.

According to a guardian whose son is a fourth grader in an English medium school, “I have to purchase 56 notebooks, 18 books, a lot of pens, pencils and even tissue boxes and submit the items to the school. The authorities said that they will store these items against my son's ID number and give him those time to time.”

“I think,” he added, “they have forced us to purchase much more items than required and make a considerable profit from these forced purchases.”

Then comes the cost for coaching centres. According to students and guardians, many of these institutions are failing to provide quality education, because of which a huge number of students have to go to coaching centres.

Besides, there is no apex body or umbrella association for the English medium schools where parents can go with complaints.

AKM Ashraf Ul Haque, president of Bangladesh English Medium School Parents Forum, said, “Most of the students of English

Secondary Education, Dhaka, there are around 4,500 English medium schools in the capital whereas only 142 of them took registration from the board.

Prof Tapan Kumar Sarkar, chairman of the board, said, “It is true that most of the English medium schools in Dhaka and Chattogram are not registered. Actually, we cannot take any steps to regulate these schools or to take steps against the unregistered schools due to a lack of legal and organisational mechanism.

“When a school applies for registration, we require them to teach Bangla and Bangladesh studies as dictated by the National Education Policy-2010. If they follow these guidelines, we register them. However, as there is no law about English medium education, we do not have the organisational mechanism and capacity to monitor and control these institutions.”

He also said the Ministry of Education is drafting a guideline to regulate English medium institutions and the process will be completed within a year or so.

On April 23, 2014, the High Court ordered English medium schools to stop taking session fees or readmission fees following a writ petition by parents of two students. Then on May 25, 2017, the HC passed the verdict banning session or re-admission fees and issued 17 guidelines to regulate operations of English medium schools.

However, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on January 3 last year stayed 16 out of 17 directives of the HC. The only directive that was exempted from the stay order was the directive to the school managing committees to celebrate cultural heritage of Bangalee nation in the schools.

This stay order came as a massive blow to students and guardians who have been advocating for controls on these institutions.

Ashraf ul said, “English medium schools are now taking session fees and various other fees in the absence of any restriction. The government initiative to regulate these schools which got momentum after the 2017 verdict slowed down again considerably.”

Experts have opined for reforms and regulations in English medium education.

Mohammad Mojibur Rahman, associate professor of Institute of Education and Research (IER), Dhaka University said, “The government must decide on how they will provide education to its citizens. Will it be provided as a commodity or as a service? According to our constitution and laws, education is a right and thus it should be provided as a service.

“The government should form a supervisory body to manage activities of these private institutions. Formation of such a body is a precursor to smooth delivery of any service.”

Prof Dr Siddiqur Rahman, former director of IER and one of the framers of National Education Policy-2010, said, “We have been advocating for an Education Act for a long time. Due to the lack of this act, we could not implement many positive initiatives in our education system, including reforming the English medium education and regulating coaching centres.

“Quality of teachers, school infrastructure, curriculum, co-curricular activities and role of the owners in managing schools should be categorically reviewed to reform these institutions.”

## The government must monitor



Eminent academician Prof Dr Siddiqur Rahman was a former director of Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University, and one of the members of National Education Policy 2010 formulation committee. Recently he talked to Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan of The Daily Star about the reforms required in English medium schools.

Q. Students and their guardians alleged that many English medium schools are taking excessive fees from their students but they are not providing quality education. Why is this happening?

A. First we have to ask why our guardians are sending their children to English medium schools? One of the major reasons is the declining quality of our education system that cannot ensure proper language skills and interpersonal skills necessary for the job market.

English medium institutions, as they teach according to the UK and the US curriculum, have created a perception in our society that their students will be proficient in English and learn other skills which are sought after in the global job market. As a result, many guardians do not hesitate to spend a huge amount of money to teach their children in an English medium school. As there is no monitoring from the government, these schools are being operated on the whims of their owners who often consider these institutions no less than a money making venture. Such mind-set and lack of monitoring enable them to extract as much money as possible from students while providing minimum services. You will find many schools which do not have adequate infrastructure, playground, and qualified teachers but still they are taking high tuition fees.

It is very true that many of these institutions cannot provide quality education despite the fact that they are taking a lot of money. We have

- » Number of registered English medium schools in Dhaka **142**
- » Number of students in registered English medium schools **75,760**
- » **42.21** percent of them are girls
- » Total number of English medium schools in Dhaka around **4,500**
- » All these schools are privately owned

seen that very few of these students can qualify in university admission tests. The government must monitor how much they are charging and what services they are providing.

Q. Why could these schools not be brought under monitoring and supervision yet?

A. In the National Education Policy-2010, we had taken several measures to ensure monitoring and supervision in English medium schools. We recommended teaching four core subjects in all streams of education. These core subjects are Bangla, Mathematics, Science and Bangladesh Studies. There was no restriction on higher level maths or science or any other subject additionally but all the institutions were required to teach these subjects according to the curriculum and textbook issued by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). The goal of this proposal was to reduce the learning gap among students of different types of institutions and the government could monitor how these curricula are being implemented.

We also recommended forming an independent body to monitor the performance and service quality of English medium schools. However, these recommendations could not be materialised due to the absence of the Education Act in Bangladesh. Since the Education Act could not be promulgated, the state organisation could not enforce the recommendations made in the policy.

Q. What are your recommendations to reform these institutions?

A. We need to take some immediate measures to reform these institutions. The government can set a maximum limit of fees in these schools according to the quality of their services. Recruitment of qualified teachers, better teaching-learning practices in the classroom and practice of co-curricular activities must be ensured.

Like in all other private schools, a managing committee with representation from guardians should be formed to run an English medium school. The government should form an independent commission to oversee the performance of English medium schools. Guidelines given by the High Court in 2017 were also very relevant to reform these schools.



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



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“My father incurred a heavy loss in his business during the pandemic. He could not support my schooling any longer. So, I decided to prepare and sit for the O-level exam as a private candidate,” he said.

“Apart from the Tk 200,000 admission fee, I was required to pay Tk 25,000 monthly tuition fees. There are various other expenditures such as fees for coaching centres and books and stationery products.”

This correspondent talked to the admission offices of eight English medium schools in Dhanmondi, Gulshan and Uttara and found their admission fee ranges from Tk 150,000 to Tk 300,000 on average per year. However, some high-end institutions charge more than Tk 500,000 admission fee per year.

The monthly tuition fees of most of the English medium schools range from Tk 8,000 to Tk 30,000. Besides, there are various other associated expenditures apart from admission fee and tuition fee.

In the beginning of an academic year,

medium schools have to depend on coaching centres for subjects like science, language, accounting and economics. We pay Tk 7,000 to Tk 10,000 per month per subject.”

On an average, a family has to pay Tk 200,000 to Tk 400,000 per year for their children's education in an average English medium school. In 12 years of education, a family has to shell out a huge amount of money.

Ashraf ul said, “Many middle and upper middle-class families are opting for English medium education for their children amid falling quality of Bangla medium schools and overall education system. Due to a lack of government control, English medium schools have turned their schools into business centres.”

In fact, the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, which gives registration to English medium schools, does not have any regulatory authority over these institutions.

According to the Board of Intermediate and