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What's so great about English education anyway?

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Despite remarkable economic growth in Bangladesh, the allocation for education in terms of percentage of GDP is low compared to most other countries in the region and globally. And one of the most overlooked problems is that we overspend on English education and under-spend on Bangla and STEM subjects.

There has rarely been any serious discussion about our education sector from an economic approach. What are the economic costs of English education? And what are its economic benefits? There is a pressing need to compare the two.

We have reasons to believe that neither the costs, nor the benefits. of English education are properly assessed. The benefits are also artificially exaggerated by a) the imposition of the English language by the colonists and the high status attributed to it by our own colonial mindset; b) the domination of the Urdu-speaking West Pakistan over the then East Pakistan and the relief from that sought by Bangladeshis by acquiring an English education; and c) the influence of a small but powerful elite/pseudo-elite group within Bangladesh propagating the importance of English.

These factors have given way to the government's uncritical prescription and implementation of English as a compulsory subject from Classes 1 to 12. Globalisation has also created a strong perception that English and economic development are positively

at all levels of education was taken at a sentimental point in the history of our country. However, two things acted against the realisation of the objective of this decision: 1) the tumultuous situation in educational institutions resulting in a total lack of quality education and 2) the absence of any government programme to have textbooks and other related books translated or composed in Bangla.

By the time our education system gained some normalcy, a culture of mediocrity had come into being within the school system. In addition to a grave loss in the quality of education in general, a lamentable quality of English education became a matter of the greatest concern for the dominating social class. The intelligentsia, instead of looking for ways to circumvent the problem, started blaming the government for the decision of making Bangla

This led to the proliferation of English-medium schools, leading to the commercialisation of education,

has shown that overexpenditure in English education has led to under-expenditure for other subjects, particularly Bangla and STEM subjects. But the reality is that all students do not need perfect English skills for their working life.

foreign influence in the training of English teachers and a spread of specific pedagogical models. What is more tragic is that the government itself joined the bandwagon by The decision to implement Bangla introducing the English version of

Recently, research the Bangla curriculum. Middle-class parents, in their quest to achieve the perceived benefits of an English education, are rushing to any English version schools available.

> Recently, research has shown that over-expenditure in English education has led to under-expenditure for other subjects, particularly Bangla and STEM subjects. At the same time, English education drains away a disproportionate amount of students'

gain skills necessary for them.

for all students in specific aspects of required in these segments or the sublanguage learning, that is, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Our experience and analysis with the implementation of an English Skill Enhancement Language Program in rural Bangladesh, as part of our work with an international NGO, gave us some insight into the needs and aspirations of common people vis-à-vis English education. The true demand for English does not exist in all sectors of Bangladesh's economy, but relates to specific sectors and sub-sectors. Hence, costs and benefits of an English education should be estimated in terms of

We have identified the various The education system may focus segmented markets for English in on a minimum level of performance Bangladesh and the "level" of English

sector of the education sector.

A "high" level of English education is required when teaching English (at secondary and tertiary levels); working in higher levels of the judiciary, in foreign services, for international assignments with international agencies and NGOs, and in Bangladeshi offices of multinational companies; people for employment or studies in foreign countries.

A "medium" level of English education is required when working in administration or working as a primary school teacher. And finally, 'specialised" training in English is required when becoming a specialist professional (in medicine, engineering, science, etc); working in the ICT sector; working in international trade and

areas related to international supply chains, in tourism and hospitality industries; and working abroad - in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled

VISUAL: AFIA JAHIN

In our view, an economic costbenefit analysis of English education will lead to the right amounts of expenditure in English, Bangla and STEM education. To this end, we working in the media; and training recommend that the government creates an effective English curriculum to meet the basic needs of the population, leaving medium and high levels of skills outside the regular curriculum. Public and private sectors should also act together to collect and analyse data and information on the costs and benefits of acquiring an above-basic level of English education when working under different segments of the economy.

The reality is that all students do not need perfect English skills for their working life, let alone for life in general. The individual needs and aspirations of students should be the primary driving force to help them "segmented" markets.

Which path do we want to be on?



development. This

brand illiberalism, methodically and deliberately camouflaged by ruling elites under the aegis of economic growth, indicates that there is enough apprehension surrounding Bangladesh signing a death warrant

for democratic practices.

The country is now preparing for a litmus test in its quest to determine whether it has both the capacity and the political will to refurbish a fragmented, divisive,

This year will define whether

Bangladesh can preserve its institutional ambitions towards being a liberal democracy. But the values that were enshrined by Bangladesh's founding architects within the framework of a robust constitutional setup are being redefined in a discreet, dangerous and inconspicuous manner – firmly putting democracy at odds with is a columnist and policy analyst He can be reached at aftab. ahmed@alum.utoronto.ca

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from events of the yesteryears, and

dissent - showcasing a tendency It is imperative to bring voters to monopolise legal devices and to conversations pertaining to the networked technologies with the 2023 general elections. Both the intention of consolidating power Awami League and the BNP should and preserving the dwindling

Given the extensive use of rigid digital security rules to selectively suppress dissent, it is not a doubts over whether these parties stretch to contend that Dhaka

recalibrate their political focus away legitimacy of the state drive forward alternative policy



visions for the country. One has

The country's regulatory regimes, including the DSA, have been used to suppress political dissent.

fragile and profoundly prejudiced electoral system. Politically, while turnout of 80 percent, with the AL Bangladeshis empathise with the historical struggles of the ruling Awami League and resonate with Sheikh Hasina's developmental agendas, they are equally conscious in holding the regime that, for many, have governed during the totality of their adult life, accountable for their For those born after 1994, the

right to vote has neither been guaranteed nor realistically ensured by the state. The general elections of 2014 and 2018 were to act as inflection points in Bangladesh's history in a way, transitioning the baton of political engagement from the older generation to the youth.

Yet, both elections failed in respecting democratic standards. Blame can be attributed to both major parties, but the fact remains that 2014 saw a voter turnout of less than 40 percent, with more than 50 percent of MPs being elected

On the other hand, 2018 was

seemingly attaining over 74 percent of the votes. The official framing of the election was contrary to what political observers, journalists and analysts were reporting from polling booths across the country. Largescale rigging, voter intimidation, and pre-election stuffing of ballot boxes represented the unfortunate

tale of 2018, and one can stipulate that it was indeed a "managed" electoral exercise.

The problem with holding onesided elections, irrespective of how well the country may be performing on the economic front, is that it moulds a serious deficit of public trust towards the government and its institutions. Given that the AL has been in power since 2009, and in admitting that Sheikh Hasina's tenure has been a game-changer in setting a policy tone for tangible investments in infrastructure, the liability of engineering a disengaged voting base (within the purview of an infant democracy in decline),

Election Commission indicated a actually care about the sanctity of might be mirroring Beijing in its the vote – but this should not deter citizens from voicing their demands regarding free, fair and credible elections.

> Some may ask, if countries like China can choose to have a centralised one-party system, which drives forward economic development, Bangladesh?

For one, Bangladesh is no China, and the affinity that many political leaders have towards autocrats like Xi Jinping or Vladimir Putin is illinformed and disturbing.

Bangladesh need only remind itself of the array of sociopolitical reasons referenced by Bangabandhu and the Awami League in seeking independence from the Pakistani military architecture to understand why being a democracy is a quintessential component of the very idea of Bangladesh.

An increasingly hardline Awami League has aggressively leveraged its regulatory regimes, including the DSA, to suppress individual a debacle of another kind. The must also be attributed towards the and collective forms of political

approach towards governance and policymaking.

With new regulations on digital platforms expected to guarantee the government's authority and their right to act as intermediaries in removing/blocking content deemed "anti-state," Bangladesh is codifying authoritarian tendencies and social control within its digital landscape. The tilt towards China, in conjunction with the nation's poor experiences with the 2014 and 2018 general elections, emphasises why 2023 is going to be a make or break year for Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi public deserves to vote in free, fair and credible elections - and it is the moral and constitutional duty, predominantly of the ruling party, to facilitate this. Otherwise, for the third time in a row, Bangladeshis will be denied the chance to exercise their voting rights, and the country's liberal democratic aspirations will be overshadowed by a natural transition towards an alarming brand of digital authoritarianism.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Local Government Engineering Department

Office of the Executive Engineer District: Noakhali www.lged.gov.bd

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Invitation for Tenders (IFT for Works) e-Tender Notice No-40/2022-23

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP Portal (http://www.apropure.gov.bd) for the procurement of works as stated as below:

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Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.spracure.zov.bd) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-CP System Portal and from e-GP help deak (helpdesk @eprocure gos bo



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