

THE PROBLEMS OF ADMISSION COACHING

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University admission in Bangladesh is an extremely stressful phase for high school graduates. In the absence of a holistic evaluation process, the pressure of preparing for multiple heavily competitive exams within a span of 3-4 months is immense.

Since these tests follow a structure that's significantly different from what the school curriculum follows, the sudden transition can be tough to adapt to and prepare for. Therefore, most admission candidates opt for attending admission coaching centres for guidance. Although not a formal academic requirement, this practice has become common over the years.

However, the general coaching culture in Bangladesh is the product of a faulty, grade-biased education system. One that actively perpetuates a "public university mania" and the pressure of pursuing STEM majors once students are done with their HSC or A Level. Unsurprisingly, admission coaching centres have come to embody some of these same problems and questionable ideals.

The classes and model tests offered by coaching centres are simply resources that are to be used for revision and practice of relevant syllabi, with some guidelines here and there. As mentioned before, these fall under no compulsory academic curriculum. Keeping that in mind, the extent of promotional activities and rather hefty

amount of course fees (the highest range being BDT 18,000 –22,000 depending on course subjects) charged by many of the prominent admission coaching centres may just be too high. Some even go above and beyond by constantly calling and pressuring both the students and the parents about enrolment following HSC exams sessions and preceding admission exam sessions.

Misbaul Masud Joy, who sat for his HSC in 2021 from Notre Dame College, Dhaka and now goes to Institute of Business Administration (IBA), University of Dhaka, had a bitter experience to share.

"After I got selected for IBA, I decided to skip the model tests for BUET (Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology) that a particular coaching centre where I was enrolled was offering. They used to call thrice a day, and at one point basically scolded me for

not choosing a STEM major. Afterwards, they also called my parents and complained about me being an insolent child," he said.

Acceptance into public universities, despite their many systemic and administrative issues, is still widely considered to be a parameter for judging a student's worth in Bangladesh. To make the same point, coaching centres also put a noticeable effort in recruiting current students and graduates from public universities as course teachers, most of whom proudly voice these very ideals in classes.

It's not at all unusual for them to belittle students from private universities, or literally any other universities that do not fall under their idea of "reputable" institutions. Besides preaching the toxic practice of institutional pride, such behaviour further pedals the detrimental outlooks in this regard.

"Within my circle, what I've noticed is that people who do not ace admission tests tend to avoid others, mainly people who did well in them. I blame the coaching centres for playing an active role in instilling this inferiority complex that most don't have control over during this time," said Ahnaf Kabir*, who sat for his HSC in 2021, and is now enrolled in Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology (AUST).

It gets worse when you take into account the existing practice of "special batches" in some of the renowned coaching centres, and realise how easy it is for these establishments to commoditise the hard work and resulting success of students for their own cause.

These special batches are separate classes of students with a previous record of academic excellence and remarkable class performance in the first few weeks of admission coaching. Naturally, most of these students end up securing top spots in public universities, largely to their

own credit. And then, the coaching centres put a distinct emphasis on their results while advertising, mostly highlighting a stellar success-rate based only on the results of this particular class. While it gets them the popularity they aim for, it leaves a lasting toll on the mental health of many students involved, given the longer class hours (up to 5-6 hours per lecture) and comparatively more grueling course materials they're put through.

Anupam Sayeed*, an admission candidate this year who completed his HSC from Sylhet Government College, added, "I'm currently attending an admission

course at a popular admission coaching centre. The other day the teachers selected a few students including myself for a separate batch amidst an ongoing class. It was an extremely unprofessional thing to do, because it evidently demotivated the rest of our classmates."

Another disturbing issue that plagues these coaching centres predominantly, is the constant inappropriate and sexist remarks made by instructors during class time. So much so, that it has become a norm for them to make misogynistic jokes, and objectify women as a way of teaching "humorously" and "in a friendly manner". It is a common occurrence to encounter a male teacher's lecture and hear at least one example that metaphorically involves women and sexual connotations in the most absurd ways possible.

"One of my instructors in the coaching centre I go to regularly talks about how he wants to cheat on his wife with a younger girl our age. Recently, he made a gross remark about our clothes by comparing the girls in the class to the *ordhomatra*, *purnomatra*, and *matrahin* alphabets in Bangla," said Deeeba*, who sat for her HSC in 2022 from Adamjee Cantonment College. Sajid Rahman, who finished his HSC in 2021 and now goes to National Institute of Technology, Hamirpur, India, had more to add, "It was common for the teachers to tell male students that getting into BUET is a sure-fire way to 'get girls' and that they should study hard for that 'reward'. Constantly bringing up women as a way to explain topics, unbelievable as it sounds, was common."

The horror of such indecent behaviour being imparted as part of education itself, in a co-ed classroom with students from drastically different backgrounds, schooling, and social bubbles, is mind-boggling. Degrading women in every possible explanation or example, making them seem like a reward that's part of institutional status to the male students in the very presence of their female classmates, frequently answering simple questions with irrelevant and inappropriate innuendos –these can't be the only way to establish oneself as a friendly teacher the students can "relate to", to liven up a class, and teach with wit and humour.

Some of the guidelines provided during orientation classes and actively throughout the admission coaching period are no less ludicrous. Repeatedly advising



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

in favour of unhealthy habits like avoiding all forms of recreation, studying eight-nine hours a day to ace the "admission war" is very common, especially in medical and engineering admission coaching centres. While there has been a noticeable change in this particular trend over the last few years, it's still not enough.

"When I attended the orientation of a coaching centre recently, they handed out leaflets including tips on how admission candidates shouldn't sleep more than 3-4 hours a day and study for the rest of it. The teachers are no better with their advice during regular classes and it's honestly depressing," said Nadeemahafrose Mondol, who sat for her HSC in 2022 from Udayan Higher Secondary School.

There's no doubt that university admission is an important academic transition for everyone who wants to pursue higher education. In our country, the competition is brutal due to the systemic shortcomings and conventional evaluation process that's not very accommodating for all kinds of learners, as it should've been.

One of the many disappointing outcomes is that it has enabled these coaching centres to commercialise these very problems as part of a glorified "admission war". Despite not being part of any compulsory curriculum, they've become a compulsory part of the academic journey for most students.

Admission coaching centres are profiting off the general misconception and anxiety surrounding this whole case while actively circulating the same things and promoting equally questionable ideals inside the classrooms. Is this really how we're preparing young minds right before they enter an arena where they're expected to reach their full potential as human beings, learners, and most importantly changemakers?

*Names have been changed for privacy

Hamama's problems smell like daruchini because she's dweeep into them 24/7. Send help at fatin.hamama003@gmail.com

