

What about the English medium students who decide to stay back?

A lack of institutional support, persisting stigma against local education, and subpar coaching catered to the demographic leave students in disarray.

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People consider it an invariable fact that students completing their secondary education from English medium schools will leave the country after their A level or International Baccalaureate examinations and pursue their higher education abroad. However, when students choose to pursue their undergraduate degree in Bangladesh, they face obstacles from an array of fronts.

There are a multitude of reasons why students might choose to stay back in Bangladesh for their higher education. For many, the cost of a foreign education plays a significant role in their decision. Sumaita Zahin is a fifth-year medical student at Ibrahim Medical College and a graduate of Manarat Dhaka International School. She attests, "If I could afford it, I would have gone abroad. I even got into a university in Canada. However, not getting a scholarship was the only reason I chose to stay back in Bangladesh."

Subhan Zawad Bihan, a final year undergraduate student at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), says, "I received scholarships from a few US colleges. However, my older sister had gotten admitted to Rangpur Medical College, and my parents didn't want me to move away too as the house would feel too desolate."

For many others, particularly female students, familial and societal barriers and expectations make pursuing an undergraduate degree abroad an unreachable dream. Rasha*, a third-year student

He also says, "However, I have personally not discriminated against students who preferred to stay back."

This experience is not universal as Rasha says, "My counsellor would openly criticise the quality of education and the environment at local universities. My school subtly conveyed that students were not expected to stay in Bangladesh and that staying back should not even be considered an option. I personally believe this is a key factor that fuels the stigma against students who choose to stay back."

Turuna Ishraq, a first-year student at the Institute of Business Administration at Dhaka University (IBA, DU) and a graduate of S.F.X. Greenherald International School, says, "My school, and most likely other English medium schools, assumes that every student is going to leave the country. So, my school didn't provide any substantial resources that

even that coaching is unbelievably disorganised," laments Aritha Shasmeen, an alumnus of Sunnysdale School and a current Biomedical Engineering student at BUET. "The question papers they gave us were simply translated into English from Bangla and riddled with grammatical errors that sometimes changed the entire meaning of the questions. The coaching centre would just dump a bunch of books and question banks on us without proper guidance as to how we should be approaching the syllabus."

Turuna echoes this sentiment. "The resources provided by the coaching I attended were subpar, to say the least. I had a lot of trouble understanding the new content. It was made worse by the fact that the text seemed to have been translated by Google Translate. I had to rely on the notes provided by the coaching centre because there were absolutely no resources online," she says.

Admissions coachings that specifically design courses for English medium students are also significantly more expensive than ones for NCTB students.

Riz Mohammad Hossain Khan, another student at IBA, DU who finished his A level from S.F.X. Greenherald International School says, "Until recently, BUET's minimum requirements for English medium



ILLUSTRATION: ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM

at Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) felt pressured by her family to stay back because they believed living abroad by herself would pose too many dangers.

Regardless of the reasons students choose to stay back, institutions should provide support to make the process easier. However, the overwhelming stigma students face from school officials when they choose to stay back is demoralising. Counsellors and teachers offer little to no help when it comes to preparing for public university entrance tests.

Towheed Hussain Chowdhury, currently a college counsellor at International School of Hyderabad and a former counsellor at a prominent English medium school in Dhaka, disagrees, "I have no reservations for students staying back. This is not due to prejudice but rather it reflects the concept of demand and supply. Most students currently attending prestigious schools generally prefer to study abroad, as they have the financial means to pursue a degree overseas. Hence, it is likely that they will allocate more resources to help students secure places at renowned universities worldwide."

I could make use of for my admissions process."

From the very beginning of high school, and even long before that, teachers and school officials push the idea of leaving the country upon their students. Additionally, they constantly speak of students who have gained admission into top foreign universities but rarely highlight those who chose to stay back. This approach is inconsiderate as it does not benefit students who don't have the means to study abroad.

English medium students also find that the resources available to prepare for entrance tests are few and far between. "Proper and useful academic resources are scarce. There is only one coaching centre that caters to us, and

applicants were higher than those of Oxford University's for comparable degrees."

Our country's educational system stacks the odds against English medium students who want to stay in Bangladesh. Universities need to take an active role in not alienating these students. While counselling for university admissions abroad exists within most English medium schools, these services should also extend their support to students who intend to stay in Bangladesh. Be it through seminars on the requirements for public university admissions, sessions on the timeline for the admission cycle, or just general guidelines on how to prepare, the provision of this support has to start from schools. That can only be achieved when educators and counsellors make a proactive effort to uproot the stigma against students choosing to pursue their undergraduate degrees in Bangladesh.

**Name has been changed upon request.*