

Surviving first semester abroad as an international student



A report by UNESCO, in 2023, over 52,000 students from Bangladesh went to 55 countries to pursue tertiary education. Within the last decade or so, the number of Bangladeshi students going abroad has risen by 119 per cent.

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

It is evident that many students from our country are eager and excited to pursue their studies abroad. However, most of them are not prepared to deal with the changes and challenges. First semester abroad can feel overwhelming as you juggle academics, cultural differences, finances, and personal well-being.

Here's a quick survival guide to help you settle in and make the most of your first few months abroad.

ACADEMIC NAVIGATION

Universities abroad often emphasise independent learning, critical thinking, and research. You may find fewer lectures and more assignments, group projects, and presentations compared to what you experienced in Bangladesh during your secondary education.

Don't hesitate to approach professors during office hours or join study groups with classmates. Most universities also offer writing centres, libraries with digital resources, and tutoring services. Make use of these early so you don't fall behind.

DEALING WITH CULTURAL SHOCK

Moving from Bangladesh to a new country can bring culture shock. Different food, social norms, accents, and even classroom etiquette can all contribute to the shock.

At first, it may feel confusing or even intimidating. The key is to stay open-minded and curious.

Attend cultural events organised by your university, connect with student associations, and learn about local customs. You are also likely to find dedicated Bangladeshi communities at your university, so don't hesitate to join them for different events and discussions.

DEALING WITH HOMESICKNESS

Homesickness is common, especially in the first semester. Missing family meals, Eid celebrations, or even the comfort of speaking Bangla can hit hard.

Stay connected with loved ones through regular video calls, but don't let it consume all your free time. Build a support system with new friends, both from Bangladesh and other countries.

BUDGETING AND INSURANCE

Living abroad comes with expenses you might not have faced back home, including rent, utilities,

transportation, and groceries. Create a monthly budget and track every expense. Avoid unnecessary spending, like eating out too often.

You will also find that public transport, museums, and stores around campus often offer student discounts. Equally important is health insurance. Many countries require international students to have coverage.

TRAVELLING

Your first semester is not just about academics. Travelling gives you a chance to explore the country, understand its people, and take a break from routine.

Plan short trips during weekends or semester breaks. Use affordable options like student train passes or budget airlines.

“When moving to the UK, set up a bank account, get a SIM card, and use apps like Citymapper for transport. Various applications also provide student discounts to make living a bit easier. Navigate the job market a bit and build your CV as soon as possible.”

SAMIR AHAMED, Brunel University of London, United Kingdom

GETTING A PART-TIME JOB

Many Bangladeshi students look for part-time jobs to cover expenses. Rules differ depending on the country; some allow up to 20 hours a week during the semester and longer work hours during semester breaks.

Jobs on campus, such as working in the library or cafeteria, are often easier to manage alongside studies. Before applying, check your visa regulations to ensure you don't violate any conditions.

The first semester abroad can be challenging, but it's also a time of immense growth. With the right mindset, careful planning, and a willingness to step out of your comfort zone, you can thrive academically, socially, and personally.



83% of international graduates say their UK degree helped them secure a job (Universities UK International report).

27 UK universities rank among the world's top 200.

The UK education advantage

Studying in the UK opens a world of academic excellence, innovation and global opportunity for Bangladeshi students. With world-renowned universities and practical teaching approaches, the UK equips students to realise their potential. According to QS figures from 2025, the UK hosts two of the world's top three universities and 27 institutions among the top 200 globally; three UK universities also rank in the top 10 of the Times Higher Education World University Ranking 2025.

Master's programmes remain a significant draw for Bangladeshi students, and UK graduates are highly employable. The QS Graduate Employability Rankings and a report by Universities UK International found that 83% of international graduates said their UK degree helped them land a job.

Beyond academics, the student

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experience is rich and diverse. The UK's multicultural campuses foster a global mindset while allowing students to share and celebrate their identity. Student life includes sports, arts, societies and volunteering, and universities provide orientation, academic support, career counselling

and mental-health resources to help students thrive.

Cost is a key concern, but the UK offers a range of scholarships and financial-support options, from partial awards that reduce tuition to full funding covering program fees, living costs and return airfare.

GREAT Scholarships are a popular option for students with an undergraduate degree who plan to pursue postgraduate study in the UK. If you're already a UK alumnus, register on the British Council's global Alumni UK portal to expand your professional network, access webinars and masterclasses, and stay informed about training and events.

With world-class teaching, strong employability outcomes and comprehensive support systems, the UK remains a top destination for Bangladeshi students seeking academic quality and global opportunities.

From fear to FLUENCY



SAIFUL ISLAM, CEO, English Therapy

Saiful Islam, an author and Founder & CEO of an English teaching platform named “English Therapy”, has spent the past eight years helping thousands of learners become fluent in English.

The Daily Star (TDS): As the CEO of English Therapy, where do you see English proficiency playing the biggest role for students aiming to study abroad?

Saiful Islam (SI): I saw so many talented people held back simply because they could not express themselves confidently in English. Our education system puts heavy emphasis on written exams, but little on real-world speaking or listening. Students can memorise vocabulary, yet freeze in conversation. That is why I founded English Therapy to create a practical, enjoyable alternative to traditional coaching. For those going abroad, proficiency matters most in English-speaking countries like the US, UK, Canada, and Australia. Beyond just academics, it is crucial for business, law, and even STEM fields, where clear technical communication is key.

TDS: What do you find are the most common weaknesses, and how does English Therapy address them?

SI: Speaking is by far the weakest skill for most learners. It's a mix of fear, lack of practice, and the influence of the mother tongue. Listening is another major hurdle, especially when faced with

“Confidence in English is not about passing a test. It is about being able to stand anywhere in the world and make your voice heard.”

unfamiliar accents. Students may know grammar rules or score well on paper, but when it comes to real-time interaction, confidence crumbles. At English Therapy, we counter this with immersive methods — mock lectures, debates, personalised learning plans, and digital practice tools. For those heading overseas, we also provide cultural orientation so they are not lost when facing everyday conversations or academic settings.

TDS: Your work seems to go beyond just test prep. What is your bigger vision?

SI: Admission is only the first step. Many students discover the real challenge starts once classes begin: writing papers, joining discussions, adjusting to different teaching styles, and even making friends in a new culture. Our mission is not only to get them through exams but to build lifelong communication skills. We want them to thrive in any global environment, whether in the classroom, workplace, or everyday life.