

Is the NCTB curriculum too rigid with subject choices?



ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Ever since I was little, I enjoyed flipping through my elder brother's textbooks, completely ignoring my own that demanded immediate attention. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) textbooks seemed much more interesting when they weren't my own, which was how I discovered Agriculture Studies, Economics, and Finance.

I had made up my mind to study these as my electives when I was older, but things didn't end up working out that way, as my institution, which is a well-known all-girls' school, didn't offer agriculture at all, and I had decided to study in the Science group.

I had no qualms about studying any particular subject in the Science stream, although I was never particularly keen on Physics. That being said, I often lamented the fact that I was bound to study general subjects like Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or Bangladesh and Global Studies (BGS), which, in my opinion, had a rather unfocused syllabus, instead of Economics or Civics.

Given the choice, however, I would have liked to adopt a more diverse mix of subjects, which is a flexibility



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allowed in the international curriculum. O level and A level students are allowed to choose an assortment of subjects of their choice, and determine a number after a required minimum.

Of course, this approach may clash with the way the admission exams are set up for the Science groups. For Engineering exams, it's required for Bangla Medium students to have Higher Mathematics as a compulsory subject and either Statistics or Biology as an optional. For A levels, a student must have a minimum required grade in Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics. For Medical exams, it's mandatory to have taken Biology. Most other admission exams do not have such stringent requirements, so students with mixed backgrounds generally face no problems sitting for them.

Given that many students do not have a prospective career or higher studies stream in mind from secondary school, it makes sense for certain subjects to be mandatory. However, a completely “pure science” or “pure business” subject stream is not the only way to go, as someone with a Humanities or Business Studies focus may also wish to study subjects like Higher Mathematics, Biology, or Physics, and vice versa.

This can be implemented with minimal changes to the admissions system requirements. Not to mention, allowing a mix of subjects may also help students realise what they truly want to study, instead of feeling trapped within a select few options. I've seen a lot of my peers sign up for a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) degree without any particular knack for the subject itself, simply due to the fact that it felt like a waste of four years of effort to switch to a non-STEM major after studying in the Science division.

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There may be some logistical obstructions in implementing this, considering the availability of teachers and the distribution of students. That being said, the curriculum should be set up in a way conducive to the betterment of students at the cost of some difficulty on the institution's part. Instead of overwhelming students with a bunch of subjects with multiple papers, the curriculum should be geared towards helping students figure out what they want to study and pursue.

While it makes sense for a wide assortment of subjects to be mandatory, students in secondary and higher secondary should be allowed some breathing room. That way, the curriculum can actually help them explore their own subjects of interest instead of confining them to STEM or non-STEM boxes.