

More than grades: THE POWER OF ECAs

“Being part of my school’s sports club and International Global Affairs Council (IGAC) has allowed me to collaborate with diverse people, build teamwork and leadership skills, and gain global exposure through events like MUNs, sports competitions and cultural performances that is continuously helping in shaping my future.”

Sunehra Subah
A-level student,
CIDER International School

BY TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

English-medium schools in Bangladesh emphasize holistic development alongside academics. Students from junior levels through A-Levels participate in debate clubs, Model United Nations (MUNs), sports teams, arts workshops and coding classes to sharpen skills beyond the classroom. Experts note that these extracurricular activities (ECAs) develop leadership, communication and critical thinking. These activities help students develop leadership skills and sharpen communication abilities while boosting problem-solving and passion. A student at Chittagong’s CIDER International, Sunehra Subah, agrees as she says participating in debate taught her to “think on my feet” and craft logical arguments, abilities she now uses daily in class discussions.

ECAS BUILD A RANGE OF TRANSFERABLE ABILITIES WHICH INCLUDES:

» **Leadership & confidence:** Leading debates, organizing events or captaining teams lets students take charge. Students agreed that ECAs improved their leadership qualities and communication skills.

» **Teamwork:** Sports, group projects and clubs teach collaboration. Playing a team sport is associated with teamwork skills and even hand-eye coordination. Students learn to rely on peers and share responsibility.

» **Creativity:** Music, visual arts, drama and even coding spur creative thinking. Many students improve their skills in the arts, primarily music, dance and visual arts, in order to share their talents” online. Building robots or apps in coding clubs similarly engages inventive problem-solving.

» **Time management:** Balancing studies with clubs or volunteering demands planning and discipline. Dedicating hours each week to practice or meetings teaches students to juggle priorities. This in turn helps students in understanding the strict time-management and organization

» **Global awareness:** Model UN, language clubs and international volunteering expose students to other cultures and world issues. Starting volunteering work as early as O levels teaches young people about the reality of life, which universities mostly cannot provide. Sunehra adds, “representing other countries in MUN broadened my

perspective, giving me insights into global challenges and diplomacy.”

TEAMWORK & DISCIPLINE

Many ECAs thrive on teamwork. School sports teams, house competitions and coding contests force students to collaborate. These activities reinforce discipline: training for a match or meeting club deadlines demands commitment. These consistent effort in a passion project demonstrates dedication and specialisation which are qualities recruiters and admission officers want to see. Sunehra observes that her basketball captaincy taught her to communicate clearly with teammates and respect roles. Such teamwork experiences not only improve grades but also boost university applications with evidence of real-world

collaboration.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

ECAs give English-medium students an international outlook. MUNs, international debating contests and language clubs put students in global contexts. Similarly, volunteering at NGOs or community projects connects them with social issues at home and abroad. In practice, organising charity drives or environmental projects connects teens to global causes. These activities foster empathy and cultural awareness. By

engaging with students from different backgrounds, Sunehra says she gained confidence in public speaking and it “opened her eyes to how issues like climate change look different around the world.” Such experiences help build a global perspective prized by universities overseas.

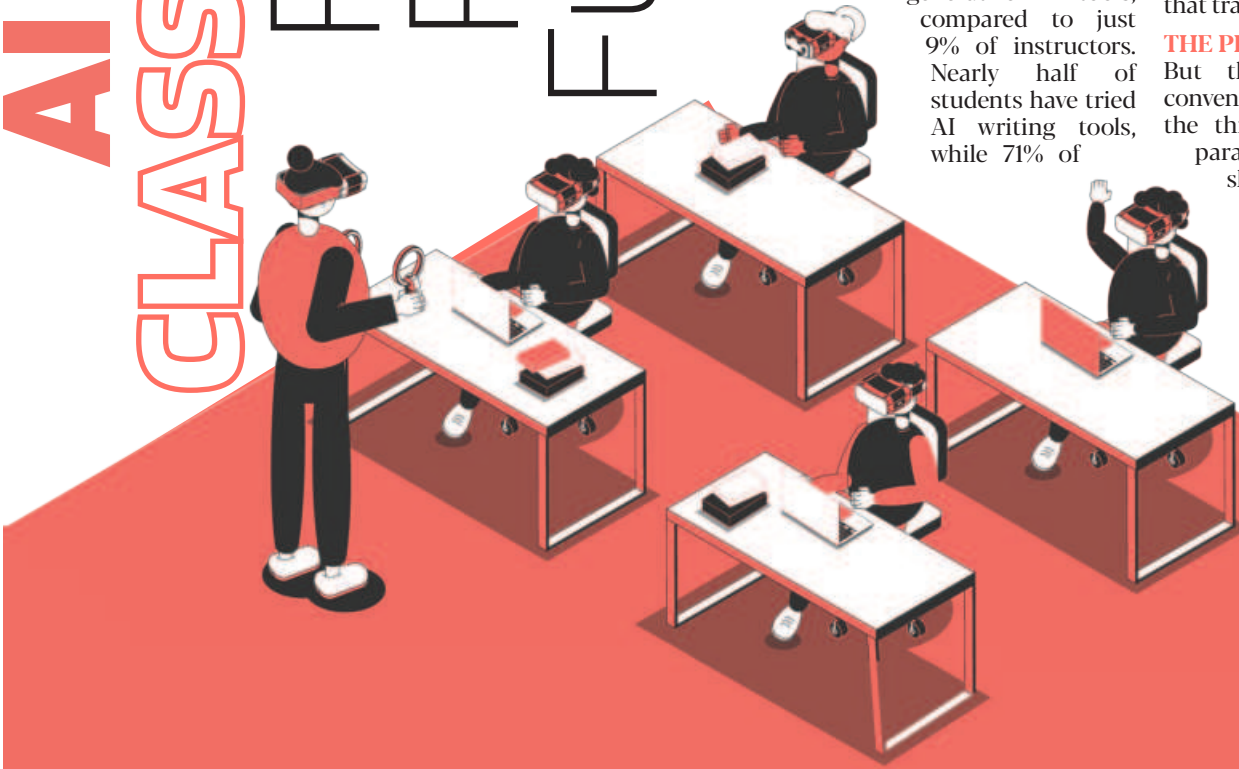
ADMISSIONS EDGE

When applying to universities in the US, UK, Canada and beyond, Bangladeshi students rely on ECAs to stand out. Admissions officers often say the extracurricular section can be the single

determining factor in an application. ECAs reveal students’ passions and soft skills. They provide a comprehensive view of a student beyond grades. For A Level applicants from Bangladesh, where thousands vie for slots at top global universities, a robust ECAs record demonstrates qualities like initiative and teamwork. Leading schools already preach this philosophy. In practice, students’ résumé committees and scholarship programs look at club achievements. Therefore, today’s English-medium learners are following the right path of engaging in debate, sports, arts and service which builds confidence and gives them a well-rounded school experience.



AI IN THE CLASSROOM Friend, Foe, or Future?



A quiet revolution is reshaping classrooms not through protests or policy shifts, but through the soft glow of laptop screens. Artificial intelligence, once science fiction, is now an everyday presence in education. A report by the U.S. Department of Education, Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning, notes that AI’s true potential lies in creating adaptive, personalized learning experiences. Yet, this powerful ally comes with a paradox.

THE ALL-KNOWING ALLY

A 2023 survey by Tyton Partners found that 27% of students regularly use generative AI tools, compared to just 9% of instructors. Nearly half of students have tried AI writing tools, while 71% of

instructors have never touched them. For students, AI can be a remarkable collaborator by breaking complex topics into digestible insights, generating essay ideas, or jump-starting creativity. It democratizes access to knowledge and turns curiosity into exploration beyond classroom walls.

AI’s adaptivity is its greatest strength. Unlike fixed educational software, AI-powered tutoring systems can gauge how a student solves a math problem and give step-by-step feedback, much like a human mentor. By reducing frustration and customizing learning paths, AI promises a level of individual attention that traditional systems rarely achieve.

THE PERILS

But there’s a dark side to this convenience. When students delegate the thinking by asking AI to write, paraphrase, or problem-solve, they skip the intellectual struggle that builds reasoning and resilience. Over-reliance risks eroding the fundamentals: structuring an argument, researching authentically, validating sources. The more we outsource cognitive effort, the more critical thinking and creativity begin to weaken.

FORGING

DIGITAL WISDOM

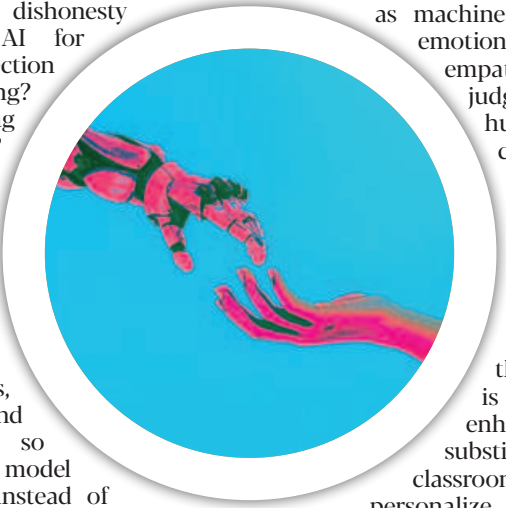
Banning AI is not the answer. It would be as futile as banning calculators or the internet. Instead, schools must build a digital constitution with clear policies defining ethical use. Students should know where assistance ends and academic dishonesty begins. Using AI for grammar correction or brainstorming? Fine. Submitting AI-written essays? Fraud.

Teachers, too, must evolve into digital mentors. Professional development should focus on understanding AI’s mechanics, benefits, and limitations so educators can model responsible use instead of fearing it.

BEYOND THE ALGORITHM

The ultimate goal is to shift education from what students know to how they think. Integrating digital citizenship and AI ethics into core curricula can help students recognize algorithmic bias, question outputs, and see AI as a tool, not a crutch.

Around the world, countries are already experimenting with AI-enhanced classrooms. In China, Squirrel AI customizes every math question to each learner’s pace. In the U.S., Khan Academy’s Khanmigo guides students through



problem-solving rather than simply giving answers. These tools help teachers by automating grading and identifying learning gaps, freeing them to focus on mentorship and creativity.

But the balance is delicate. The World Economic Forum warns that as machines grow smarter, emotional intelligence, empathy, and ethical judgment will define human success. AI can teach faster; only humans can teach why.

The Bangladesh Context

For Bangladesh, the challenge is to make AI an enhancer, not a substitute. Smart classrooms could personalize learning across urban and rural schools, reducing disparities. Yet, technology must never eclipse the teacher’s role in nurturing curiosity and compassion. Training programs for educators, equitable access to digital tools, and localized AI platforms that understand the Bangla curriculum will be essential.

MAN WITH MACHINE

AI is already seated in our classrooms, not as a rival, but as a partner. The future of education lies not in choosing between man or machine, but in learning side by side. The real revolution will not be technological, but philosophical: redefining what it means to be educated in an age where knowledge is instant, but wisdom still takes time.