

The Tree and the Pond – What We Are Doing Wrong

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If one starts to write down the problems with the education system in Bangladesh, the list would be endless, and the reason why there has not been any major developments in the last few years is the people judging it.

You don't ask the TV audience to judge a cooking competition; you ask the people available for tasting the food to do so. Then why do we not listen to what the students have to say about the education that they are experiencing?

One of the many unspoken truths about the conservative society is how it effects education. When a student isn't getting high grades in class, we allow their parents to shout at them and call them names instead of talking to them about the difficulties they are facing in class. We talk about advancing out education but we always let the previous generations be the voice of it just because they are more experienced. What we fail to acknowledge is that they are experienced in the system that we are fighting to change.

Why is this wrong? Well, remember the last time your parents told you about how amazing they were as students and how they expect the same from you? How you have more resources available because of the internet and so you should be doing even better? What they fail to acknowledge is that information and resources are not the only things available, students are too. The population went from being about 60 million in 1970 to roughly 165 million in 2017, with students being the majority. Therefore, competition has increased drastically. Gone are the days when you could just look at someone's marks or grades to deduce their potential. There are literally 33242 students walking around with GPA 5.0 right now. So if you want to be the best, you

can't expect your grades to do all the talking for you anymore.

Also, because of the increase in competition and the still-leading traditional thoughts on education, we fail to come up with an out-of-the-box solution. A friend of mine had always dreamed of studying at IBA, DU-just like every other business student who doesn't want to go abroad. So accordingly, she joined Mentors' admission classes as soon as her exams were over. She got all the lectures, never missed a single class, did everything right. We all know when it comes to IBA, at least 80% of applicants join Mentors'. When all the mock exams were completed, her name was the first on the results list. She took a picture and uploaded it on social media. And why wouldn't she? She was an "IBA sure-shot" as we like to call it. Now she is doing BBA at NSU. Why? The minimum grade requirements for an IBA applicant is 2C for an English Medium student. She had a D. Her mock results proved she had the potential to get into IBA. But the sad truth is that, even now, boards decide a student's potential based on their grades. The solution to this is right in front of us, but we fail to acknowledge it because of the power we gave to the traditional conservative society. The solution is to judge students holistically, and not entirely on their academics.

The top ranking universities in the world, including Ivy Leagues, don't have a "minimum GPA" or "Minimum grade" for application. You may have completely mediocre grades but still manage to find yourself in the most prestigious institutes. Last year, Jebin, a Bangladeshi student, received her Master's Degree in Architecture from Harvard. She had initially graduated from BUET with an average GPA of 3.5. Because there were no Grade Requirements, she could apply to Harvard, and when she did, they had to go through her application. According to them, what they loved about her was her essay. She talked about how she wants to study at Harvard and once she's done, she wanted to return to Bangladesh and build schools and playgrounds for handicapped and underprivileged children. Her essay reflected her determination and potential and they just had to accept her. Now she's back, doing exactly what she promised she would do. Harvard University has always been a dream university for most of the change-makers. And if Harvard is successful in not setting minimum requirements but still finding the most worthy students in the world, then who are we to argue? After all, our most prestigious institute, BUET, has a

World Ranking of 2025 as of right now. Maximum institutes lack proper lab facilities and research centers, and even professors or lecturers who don't match the standard international level. Some universities even fail to provide courses that can compete with courses provided internationally.

The conservative society is also very stubborn about the idea of children growing up to be doctors, engineers and business professionals. It's as if they are the only people that matter.

Dear society,
Remember the other day when you were watching a cricket match on TV wearing a green jersey and screaming "BANGLADESH! BANGLADESH!?" Remember when you were reminiscing about your youth and turned on your favorite Robindro-Nazrul songs, wishing there were artists just as good today? Remember when you got extremely emotional while watching that Shah Rukh Khan movie and then complained that Bangladeshi film industry isn't good enough?
How can you demand change and prevent it at the same time?

The celebration of academic excellence is also killing those beautiful athletic, artistic and creative dreams, which is preventing students from doing their best. When everyone is being forced to fight the same battle, whether they actually want to or not, everyone is bound to lose - the fighter whose grades weren't good enough, the athlete who just wanted to see his mother smile, the writer who desperately tried to fail - everyone.

Having put forward all the facts and painting all the scenarios, what I propose are:

- 1) Students should be allowed to study whatever they want to study and peer pressure or conventional beliefs should not be a factor while deciding the next stage in their educational lives. Leading universities should broadcast this idea and initiate projects to turn this into a reality.
- 2) An applicant should be allowed to apply and considered regardless of their grades. Yes, the process is lengthy and requires a lot of hard work, but if Ivy Leagues do it with a higher number of international students, we should do it too.
- 3) A student should be allowed to grow as a person first, and then taught how to achieve higher marks.

Educational Institutes should have at least one consultant (non-educational) who should have multiple sessions with each seemingly-troubled student to make sure they are psychologically healthy and let parents know of the situation.

- 4) The government and the ministry of education should come up with new higher levels of standard which every single institution will be required to follow. The courses provided should showcase international standards and this should help attract more international students. Every single professor and lecturer should also be required to take training courses at the beginning of their careers, to make sure they possess full understanding of the new advanced courses. The government should also make sure that every institution provides a higher minimum standard lab facilities, and establish a certain number of research centers.
- 5) Renowned international researchers should also be invited more frequently to share their finding with the students.
- 6) The government should also encourage student exchange programs and arrange for students to have the chance to do internships at highly renowned international firms.

Albert Einstein is believed to be the most genius person till date. His most famous theory is his Theory of Relativity. These are things we all know, but a fact less celebrated (thanks again to our conservative society) is that he used to be a horrible student. He was often absent in classes and none of his teachers ever liked him. He was absent for about three months before finals and barely passed his exams. He used to say he didn't like school. A great saying by Albert Einstein is:

"Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

We praise him on his intelligence and then we don't listen to him, how stubborn can an entire nation be? He wasn't the only one, by the way. Thomas Alva Edison, the genius mind behind illuminating the world with electricity, had a hard time at school too.

My ideas might seem a little over-the-top, but I think it's about time we start listening to Albert Einstein instead of just glorifying him. ■