

# An Investigation into the Problems Faced by Freshers at Bangladeshi Universities

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## Abstract

The shift from secondary level to tertiary level marks an important phase in a student's academic and personal life. This study investigates the various challenges faced by first-year university students, commonly known as freshers. This study followed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, encompassing questionnaires, interviews, and observations, to identify the primary challenges encountered by students in their initial university experience. The quantitative data is collected through a structured survey among 350 participants and the qualitative data is collected through open-ended interviews with 60 participants. All the respondents are undergraduate students of 3 private universities, 2 public universities and 2 colleges under National University in northern Bangladesh. The findings indicate that freshmen face various social, emotional, academic, and financial difficulties, including homesickness, language barriers, adjustment to new learning styles, and financial stress. A lot of students also feel mental anxiety, feelings of inferiority, and trouble with time management and communication. This study underscores the necessity for supportive measures from university administrations, encompassing counseling services, pedagogical approaches, and equal treatment for all students. If these issues are properly addressed, universities can ensure a more welcoming environment for freshers. Additionally, it will create a smoother shift to higher education and promote their academic and personal development.

**Keywords:** Freshers, Academic Transition, Challenges, Social Adaptation, Tertiary Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Moving from secondary level to university is a big step in a student's life because it marks the start of their higher education journey. This change can be both exciting and liberating, but it also comes with a lot of problems that can be very scary for new students. This study deals with such problems that first-year students, also known as "freshers," must cope up with as they start their journey at university. The transition from secondary level to university is one of the biggest challenges that new students face. The academic requirements in university markedly differ from those in high school, placing a heightened focus on self-directed learning, critical analysis, and autonomous research (Cumming, J., & Baik, C., 2017). Freshers often struggle to adjust to this new level of academic rigor, which can leave them feeling insecure and anxious about their schoolwork (Clinciu, A. I., 2013). Also, moving to a new city or campus away from their familiar home is often part of

the transition to university life. This change can be hard on the emotions of many new students, who have to deal with homesickness, loneliness, and the need to make new friends. It can take a long time and be hard to build a support system. Another common problem for first-year students is financial problem. Many first-year students have to learn how to manage their money for the first time, and the costs of university tuition, books, housing, and living (Jones, B. *et al.*, 2022). Managing the money side of university life while also studying can be very stressful. Freshmen also have a hard time with time management and study skills. Students have to balance their schoolwork with their social life, part-time jobs, and extracurricular activities because classes are often very busy. Many new students need to learn how to set priorities and use their time well. Also, the fact that the university has a lot of different kinds of people can be both good and bad. Meeting people from different cultures, beliefs, and experiences can be eye-

opening, but it can also cause cultural misunderstandings and conflicts (Jones, B., Brown, C., & Smith, J., 2023). New students need to learn how to deal with this diversity and become good at working with people from different cultures. In short, a new student at a university faces many challenges along the way. These include the academic transition, emotional adjustments, financial constraints, time management, and the need to adapt to a diverse and culturally rich environment (Yorke, M., & Longden, B., 2004). Freshmen need to be aware of and deal with these problems in order to have a successful and fulfilling college experience as they start their journey toward personal and academic growth.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The shift from secondary level to university represents an important milestone for a student. For most students, this phase opens new doors to learning, socialization, and autonomy. As higher education is growing fast in Bangladesh and universities are acing students from very diverse background, freshers go through a lot of challenges in the start of their academic career. Students are often first-generation students, or come from the countryside or do not read or listen to English used in TV channels, and struggle to cope with the academic culture, teaching styles, and communication modes used in universities. Hence, in order to grasp the type, reasons and effect of the challenges faced by first-year students this matter needs to be reviewed from previous literature.

A study conducted by Yorke & Longden (2004) and they stated that, freshers may have difficulty managing their time effectively. They may need to juggle their academic workload with extracurricular activities, social commitments, and part-time jobs. Another research performed by Thomas & Chickering (1983) and found that, freshers may need to develop new study skills in order to succeed in university. For example, they may need to learn how to take effective notes, write research papers, and prepare for exams. According to a study done by Waters & Bedeian (2003), freshers may have difficulty making new friends. They may be shy, or they may not know anyone else at their university. Waters & Bedeian (2003), further added that, freshers may miss their home and family. This is especially common for freshers who have moved away from home for the first time. International freshers may experience culture shock when they move to a new country to study. They may need to adjust to a different culture, language, and way of life. A study conducted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), in 2023 that, Freshers may experience financial difficulties. They may need to pay for tuition, housing, and other expenses. Another study performed by Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), 2022 on financial mental health stated that, freshers

may experience mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. This is because the transition to university can be stressful and overwhelming.

In Bangladesh, most of the students of different universities face the same challenges. According to a study conducted by Al-Amin, *et al.*, (2025), stated that, in Bangladesh, the stigma around mental health makes it hard for students to get help. Freshers may keep their stress inside, which can cause emotional burnout or a drop in grades. Another study done by Uddin *et al.*, (2024) To make the academic environment more supportive, universities need to make mental health conversations normal, hire trained counselors, and encourage open conversations about mental health. Furthermore, Ali, S., Khan, S., & Akram, H. (2023) stated that Bangladeshi universities are having troubles in time management since it becomes even more complex as students participate in clubs, departmental activities, or live away from home. As they don't have any previous training on balancing academic and personal responsibilities, this can lead to stress, missed deadlines and poor performance in academic results. So, it is important for universities to consider offering workshops or sessions on effective time management for the first-year students.

Another study conducted by Mridula, K. A., & bin Ahsan, W. (2025) stated that, many students in Bangladesh, especially those who are from Bengali-medium schools, face considerable struggle when attending classes in English-medium instruction and doing independent research tasks for the first time. As a result, it creates anxiety and lowers academic confidence. Therefore, universities should emphasize academic skill-building in the first semester, arranging workshops on writing, referencing, and critical thinking to help newly admitted students. A lot of students in Bangladesh come from schools that are either rural or single sex. At the tertiary level, they go to university with both boys and girls, which can be hard on their social lives. Alam, *et al.*, (2022) stated that, most of them are afraid to talk to other people because they don't have much confidence and their English isn't very good. To help new students feel like they belong, universities should use orientation programs, peer mentoring, and club activities to help them make friends.

Nath, *et al.*, (2019), further added that homesickness is something that everyone goes through, but it can be especially bad in Bangladesh, where family ties are strong and people depend on their parents for help. Students from remote districts or villages frequently encounter separation and challenges in adapting to dormitory life. To help students deal with emotional changes, universities should offer counseling and make their dorms feel like home. Ali, *et al.*, (2021) found that, this is mostly true for international

situations, but it is also true for Bangladesh, where students move from one cultural or language area to another (for example, from rural to urban areas). Culture shock can happen even within the same country because of different social norms and language differences. So, it's important for university communities to promote inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding to help both domestic and foreign students adjust. Rabbani, N. (2023), portrayed that, financial difficulties are among the major problems people in Bangladesh face. As a developing country, the people of Bangladesh have limited financial resources, which hinders their ability to maintain the cost of education, especially at the tertiary level. The majority of the freshers may feel the pressure to seek part-time work, which can negatively impact their academic performance.

Though the current literature indicates some challenges of freshers around the world and in Bangladesh, a deep insight into these challenges among diverse fresher student population in Bangladesh is still lacking. Studies previously conducted on time-management, academic skills, social integration and emotional adjustment treated them broadly. But literature on the specific experiences of freshers in the distinctive socio-cultural, economic and academic context of Bangladesh is limited. Curiously absent is attention to the intersectionality of these issues – how financial pressures, rural-urban shifts and language restrictions all combine to define student life. Furthermore, there has been little investigation about how universities might be able to adapt their support infrastructures in order to deal with these multiple challenges on university degrees. Thus, more context-specific research is required to explore the complex problems faced by Bangladeshi freshers and assess interventions in use.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach

To understand what challenges the first year students at universities face, this study follows mixed method research approach (quantitative and qualitative approach). The qualitative study is conducted to get an overall view of students of different institutions in northern Bangladesh whereas the quantitative study gives a structured platform to analyze information. It listens to real voices, explores how students feel, think, and reflect as freshers at universities in Bangladesh.

### Research site and Research Participants

The study area covered 03 private universities, 02 public universities, and 02 colleges under national university in northern Bangladesh. These universities were selected to show the differences and similarities of the attitudes of freshers. This study

focused on undergraduate English literature students of private, public, and national university in Northern Bangladesh. For qualitative approach, in total we took 60 undergraduate students' interviews from these institutions. For quantitative approach, we used a structured survey and conducted it among English literature students of these institutions. 350 students participated in the survey. English literature students of second year, third year, and final year were purposefully selected for both the interview and survey.

### Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through a mixed-method research. Here, the data for qualitative study is gained through open ended interviews and for quantitative analysis through a structured survey. These interviews carried open ended questions that allowed students to share their thoughts freely. Interviews of the private university students were conducted face to face. However, all the other interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. Each interview was more than 30 minutes long. In the interviews, small notes were taken and the interviews are not recorded. Each interview is unique as the interviews were open ended and the interviewees controlled the direction of the interview. The survey was totally online based. It was conducted using Google Forms. As the survey was structured, students had to select answers provided by us so the survey was totally controlled by us. All information was stored in Google Forms.

### Data Analysis Process

For the analysis, students were separated into three categories: private university students, public universities students, and national universities students. We personally went through every response of every individual student to find out the differences between these three types of institutions' students view on the obstacles they face as freshers. We have also used charts for further analyzing the overall responses.

### Ethical Issues and Concerns

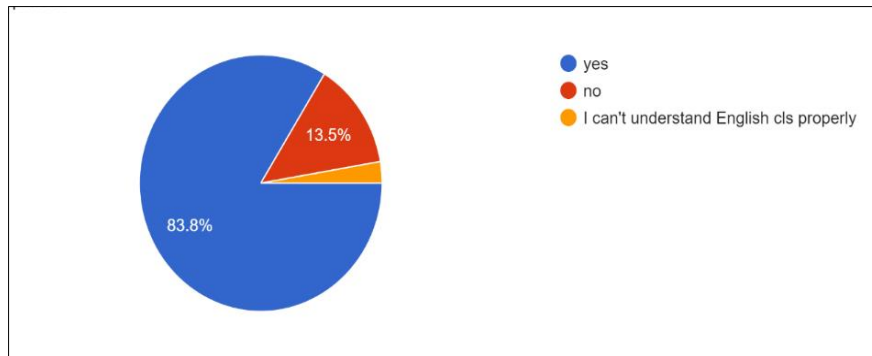
During interviews and survey verbal consent was taken from all the students. Also, to make the participants feel comfortable in answering, both the questions and the approach of the interviewer were objective. Questions were asked in a way that the students could not feel insecure.

Furthermore, the survey ensured confidentiality and meant no physical and psychological harm to the participants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers have conducted interviews with the freshers and carried out a survey on them to find out

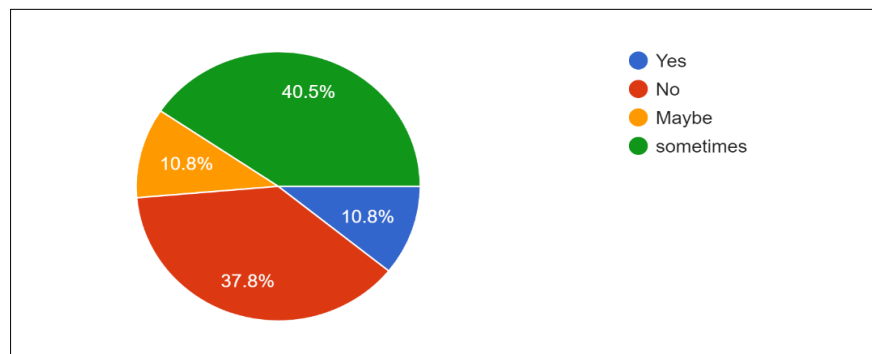
what exact difficulties they are facing. The results of the survey with proper explanation, are given below:



**Figure 1: Feeling comfortable in the classroom**

Regarding the comfort level, most of the students 83.8%, reported that they are comfortable in class, which is promising as it is an indication that they can cope well with their new environment. However, 13.5% of people still feel uneasy. Some students said they hear English lectures, but that they don't really understand those lectures which makes them anxious

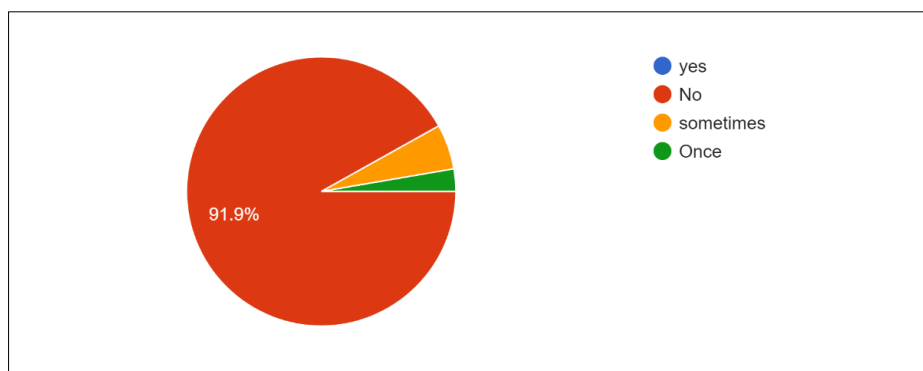
and inhibited to engage. It's a sign that, while many students are doing okay, some undoubtedly larger proportion lack the vocabulary to respond or aren't confident in using it. Teachers might need to pay special attention to these students and make the class more inclusive.



**Figure 2: Facing mental anxiety**

As for mental anxiety, 37.8% of students said they don't face it which is good. But the rest of the students agreed they sometimes or always face anxiety. This is evident that mental health may still be an issue among freshers. Many are settling into a new routine

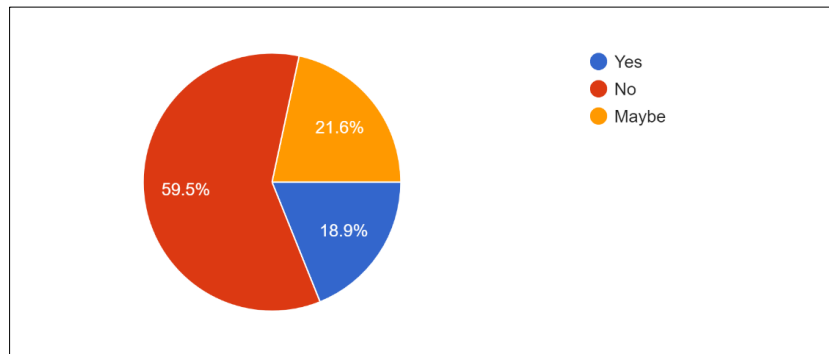
away from family, assuming more responsibilities and academic pressure. Although not everybody is affected, the numbers are considerable. Universities should take this issue seriously by arranging counseling or stress management sessions to help those who are struggling.



**Figure 3: Facing ragging in the campus**

The third question was on ragging and in response to this query, a majority shared that they didn't face any incident of ragging. This is in fact a relief, because ragging can play chaos with self-

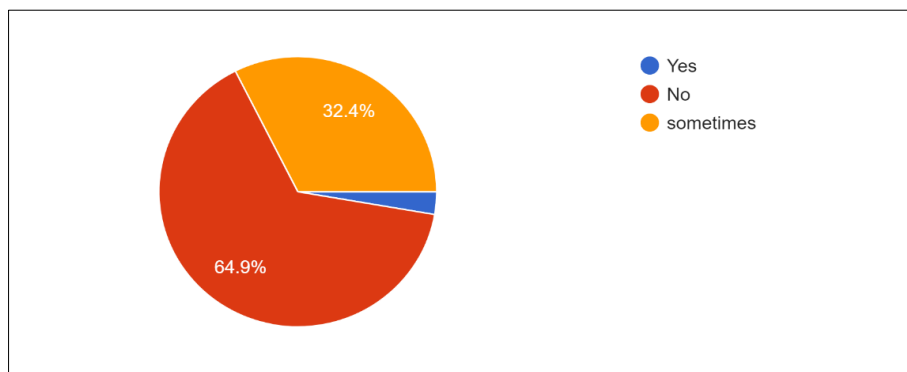
confidence and peace of mind. It appears that most of the universities are disciplined University and protects new students. So ragging is not that big an issue here, which is a good sign for the universities in Bangladesh.



**Figure 4: Facing problems due to environmental change**

About 40% students suffer issues because of change in environment. This implies that nearly half the first-year students of Bangladesh find themselves having a tough time to cope with new environment, weather and campus life. For some, it's their first time away from home, and this makes the transition more

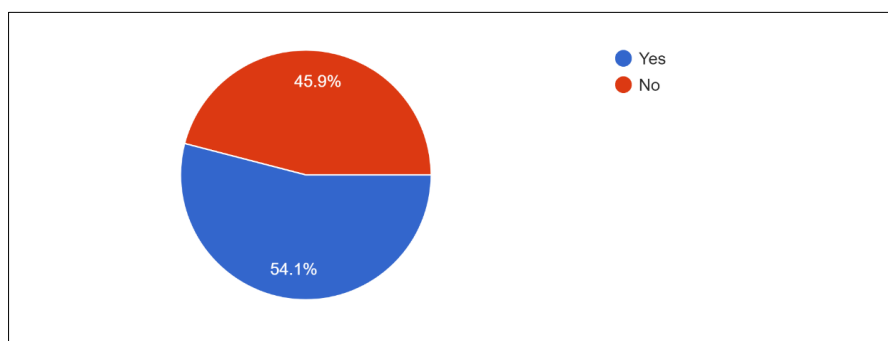
difficult. The other 60% are not experiencing problems, largely because they are more flexible or already accustomed to hostel living. But the fact that so many continue to struggle demonstrates that environmental change is most certainly a problem worth addressing.



**Figure 5: Facing problems due to medium of Instruction**

When asked about the medium of instruction, 64.9% of students said they don't face any difficulty, but 35.1% said they do. That's perfectly understandable as many students are from Bangla-medium schools and then suddenly everything in university is in English. Getting used to English-language lectures, reading and

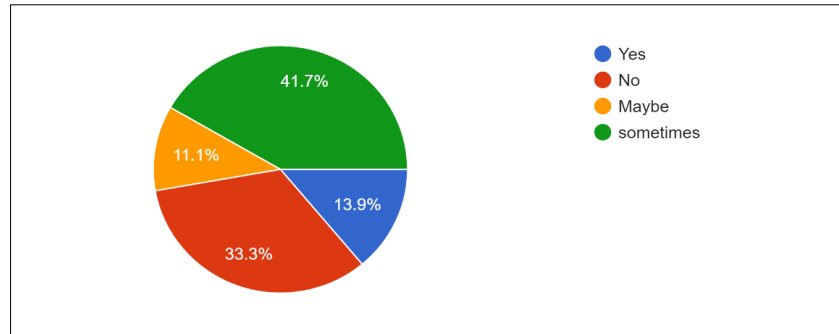
writing assignments also takes time. So, for those students, the language of instruction works as a stumbling block. Universities could assist by providing brief English support sessions or workshops at the start of the semester.



**Figure 6: Feeling of homesickness**

The results indicate that almost half of the respondents, feel homesick. That is also very common for first year students who just moved out of home. They miss family, home-cooked meals and familiar surroundings and can become unfocused and unhappy.

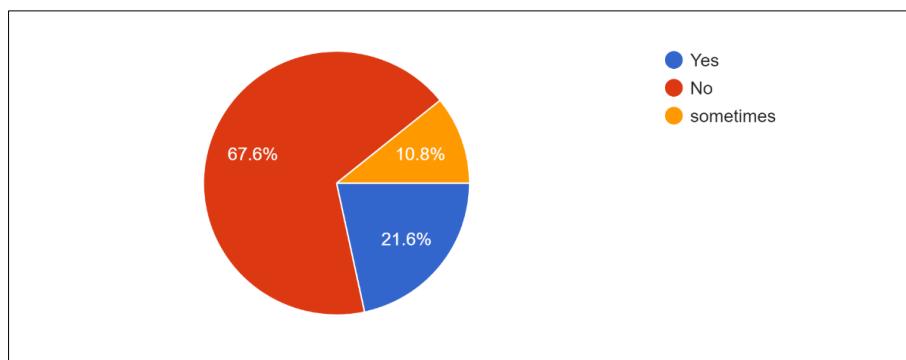
It also indicates that they feel better when they receive emotional support from friends, seniors or counseling services. It is a common problem that should not be cast aside because homesickness can develop into more serious emotional stress if not treated early.



**Figure 07: Feeling inferior to others with higher skills**

However, only 33.3% of respondents here said that they did not feel inferior to others: the rest, 67.75%, admitted feeling inferior in one way or another. This is quite worrying because it means most candidates are comparing themselves to others who may have a better English, more confidence, or already

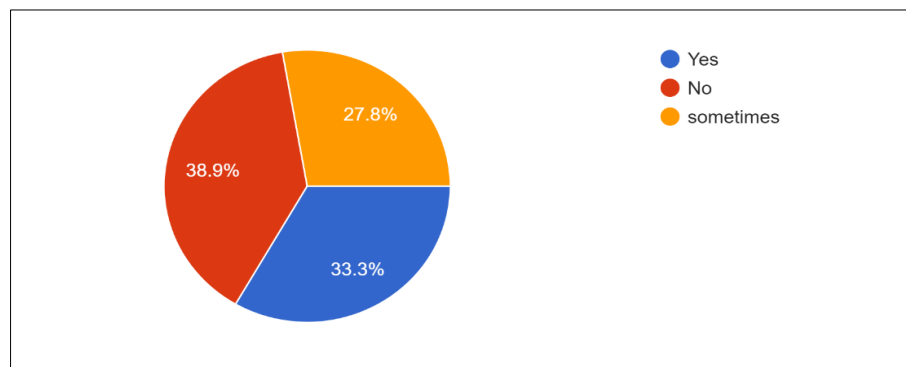
know the answers. Someone might already feel less confident in class. Teachers and mentors can take care to ensure everyone is made to feel that they are valued, supported and nobody would be deemed “less capable” than anybody else.



**Figure 8: Having problems in making friends**

About 67.6 % of participants said they don't have trouble making friends but nearly a third, or 33%, did say that do. This means that even if a lot of students are making friends, a pretty major group also continues to feel lonely or shy. It can take time for many introverted students to build connections. The

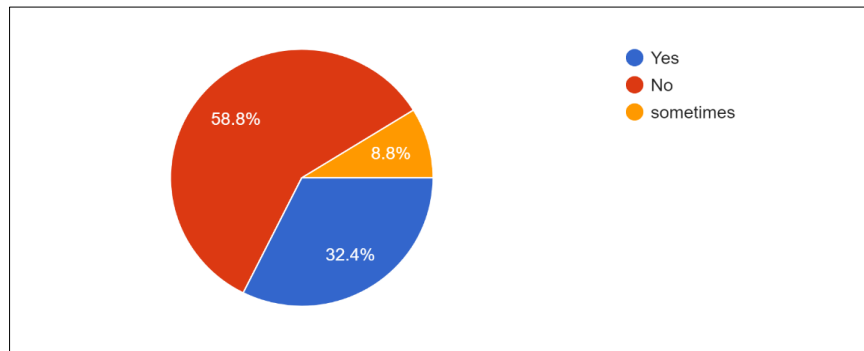
university can assist by creating experiences to bring students out of their shells via group activities and club activities that allow them to socialize more easily and meet people in a more organic way. Friends are important because it staves off loneliness and helps them acclimate more quickly.



**Figure 9: Facing academic challenges**

Nearly 70 % of students reported they have experienced academic struggles. This is one of the most important findings of the study. It shows that most freshers find university coursework, assignments and exams hard especially as the teaching and learning style is so different from school. The amount of work, not to

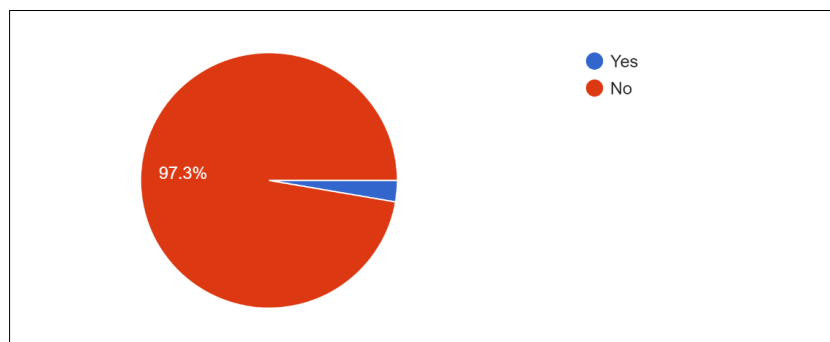
mention expectation to self-study is tough. Teachers can help students by clarifying information and providing tips for studying. This is a weak area that can be improved to help freshers to do better academically.



**Figure 10: Facing difficulties in joining clubs**

Roughly 60% of students said they had no trouble joining clubs; about 40 % did. That is to say, the vast majority are fine – but there are still too many students who don't know how to join or feel uncomfortable doing so. Maybe they're shy or don't

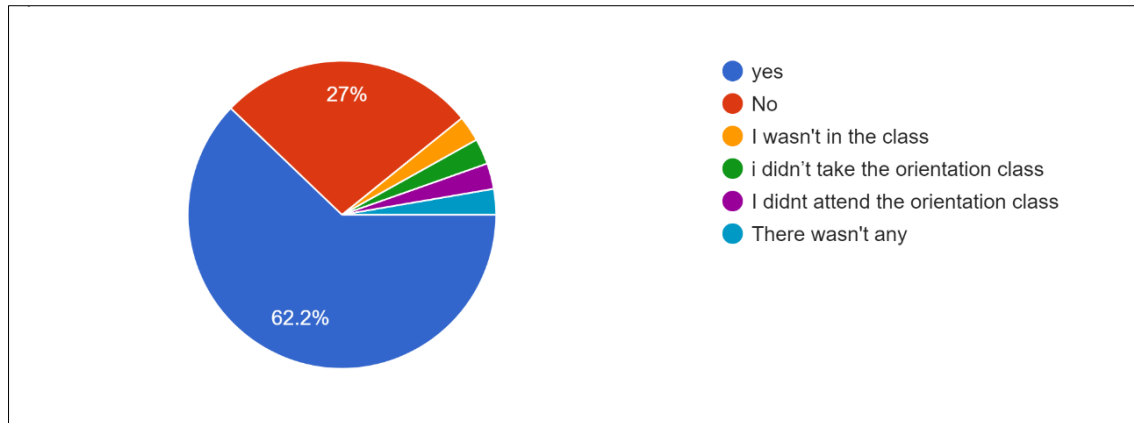
know which club matches their interests. Fact Clubs are important places for students to socialize and feel confident, so universities need to make club recruitment an easier and more welcoming process for the incoming class.



**Figure 11: Facing sexual harassment**

This figure presents a positive outcome preventing sexual harassment has reach a success rate of 97% students say they have not been harassed. That should make the university environment safe and respectful. But even being fatal in one or two cases,

awareness programs should not stop for the safety of everyone. It's good that students overall feel safe, and this needs to continue with strict policies and remaining aware.



**Figure 12: Role of orientation to create awareness of possible challenges**

Around 62% of students found the orientation class helpful in gaining an understanding of what potential challenges could arise, and all other students didn't attend or did not find it useful. This demonstrates that orientation programs have a positive impact, although some may need to be further enhanced. Perhaps some of the students were unable to come because of timing or communication problems. That the university makes these orientation sessions more interactive for students, and ensure that every fresher gets the right help when they are starting out.

During the study, interviews were conducted with several freshers from different departments to understand the actual challenges they encounter in their first year of university. Their answers show that they struggle with different things like language, adjustment, financial issues, homesickness, and study pressure.

Rahim Uddin, a student from the CSE Department, talked about his initial academic experience at the university. He mentioned, "I found it really hard to cope with the academic system here at first. In school, teachers used to explain everything in Bangla, but now at my university, almost all the lectures are in English. Sometimes I can't catch everything and feel lost."

Most of the freshers at the tertiary level of Bangladesh face this same problem. As they belong to a Bangla medium background, all on a sudden they find it difficult to adjust to the English language. These participants also talk about the struggle of time management, which goes aligns with what Yorke and Longden (2004) said that freshers often struggle to balance their studies and other activities. It is obvious from this interview that most of the freshers face both language and time management problems at the tertiary level of Bangladesh.

Another student from the Department of English, Sadia Afrin who mentioned regarding writing assignments that,

"I feel pressure to write academic essay as teachers expects us to write critically. This is completely new to me. I find it difficult to organize ideas and maintain coherence and cohesion in my assignments."

The response of this participant shows it is hard for freshers to handle the new type of academic work. They often struggle with thinking critically and maintaining an academic tone in their reports, assignments or research projects. This matches Thomas and Chickering (1983) who said that students need to develop new study skills in university.

Arif Chowdhury from the Mechanical Engineering Department stated, "There is more pressure in academic life at university level. We have labs, assignments and projects all the time. Some of us also joined several clubs, so maintaining everything is quite challenging. Sometimes I stay up late to finish my pending works. I feel mentally exhausted".

This interview portrays the overwhelming life of university students. They are facing continuous challenges to balance classes, club activities, and personal time. Nabila Rahman From Department of Sociology shared her views, "At first, I had a hard time to make new friends because I am shy. Most of my peers came with at least one person they already knew here, but I didn't. I was lonely those first few weeks. I ended up signing up for a cultural club later, and that helped me loosen up a little bit." Nabila's story is a good example of the social difficulty many freshmen have, which comes down to having new friends in a new environment. She explains that loneliness is a major problem for new students with which Waters and Bedeian (2003) agree, as they have discovered the difficulty of finding connections to be a serious adjustment. That Nabila has chosen to attend a social club like this is testament to the benefits of extra-curricular activity in bridging this gulf. It implies that student involvement in clubs and organizations can help to decrease alienation and promote social integration by eliciting full university membership.

Ahsan Kabir from Dept. of Civil Engineering stated, “I’m a small-town boy, and coming to the city of Dhaka was a dream come true for me. Everything is overpriced and overcrowded. I have pressure on me to do good in school as well because my parents expect so much from me. The transition was hard, but I’m starting to adapt.” Ahsan’s move from the country to the city represents a culture shock experience described by Waters and Bedeian (2003). Transitioning to a fast-paced, expensive city can be overwhelming for students from smaller towns. Besides the environment, Ahsan is under heavy mental pressure for due to academic load and family expectations as well. This is consistent with the literature in which novice students are typically under social and emotional pressures, which greatly affect academic performance and psychological health (Bouffard *et al.*, 2004).

The interviews illustrate a series of common problems experienced by first-year students in Bangladesh such as adjustment to home-sickness, financial requirement, language problem, social segregation and academic discrepancy. Although the specifics differ across disciplines, these concerns indicate a common experience of emotional and psychological stress as students move into university. The results confirm what is emphasized in the literature on freshmen about the great adaptation difficulties these students face and the necessity of an institutional support. Higher education could assist the reinstatement process by given better guidance and counselling, as well as a supporting academic environment to guide these challenges.

This study reveals a number of challenges experienced by freshmen in different universities in Bangladesh especially during their adjustment phase. These problems, such as mental stress, homesickness, inferiority and social/academic adaptation feelings, are found among various academic students. It is important to address these issues if first-year students are to maximize their university experience and become effectively integrated into campus life.

One of the top concerns in this study is mental stress, which generally is due to stress to adjust for a new environment, setting academic expectations and social. It is also critical that university authorities create a supportive atmosphere where, similar to the comfort of home, students find place to shelter. A well-staffed and approachable counseling service would offer the emotional and mental support the students need to come to terms with their changing psychology.

A second concern flagged by the study is the difficulty in tackling linguistic barriers, particularly for Bangla-medium students. The move to English learning can be a great challenge for many first-year students. Instructors could therefore be careful with the terms

used here, and provide education for the best understanding (e.g. images, video clippings, question-answer session). Moreover, encouragement and support from instructors can help students gain the confidence that they need to work through language and academic challenges.

And this work pinpointed issues about social embedment. Friendships can be difficult to develop for first-year students who have never met many of their peers before college, and who are residing in an apartment isolated from family and high school friends. Therefore, loneliness and homesickness are common. Universities need to build new inclusive social spaces for freshers to engage with each other, bond and take part in activities from which a community is built.

Financial issues were also a major factor, as many students complained about the high semester fees and poor facilities. In order for freshmen not to face too much pressure financially, the school should have a review of tuition and campus resources. Financially speaking, schools that solve these problems prevent something else from weighing on freshmen as they enter college.

Based on the results, it is recommended that universities are to react on these varied issues. A more nurturing culture, robust mental health services, opportunities to socialize together and upgraded facilities will help freshmen feel more at home while contributing to their success there.

## CONCLUSION

Adaptation to university is a crucial period for new undergraduate students, which brings with it several challenges that can have an impact on their academic achievement and well-being. These problems are not their individual ones but the same faced by students of universities throughout Bangladesh. If not overcome, these issues may result in feelings of loneliness and stress as well as academic loss.

The research notes that first-graders may have problems with making friends because they do not know the students, language implications related to the transition into EMIL and emotional aspects that include homesickness and not fitting in. In addition, financial worries and a lack of facilities contribute to the pressure felt by freshmen. They are the kinds of matters that university officials need to deal with holistically, by creating an environment conducive to support for academic and emotional support. The development of easily accessible counseling services, open social programmes and cheap education will go a long way towards making it easier for new students to adapt.

The results from study reveal the necessity for Bangladeshi universities to become more active in providing support to their freshman students. Universities may, in accordance to the findings of this study, resolve these issues, and establish an environment that fosters the personal, social and academic development of freshmen which will lead to a more convenient adaptation process and university life. This work is a practical guide to the hindrances first-year students encounter, and offers useful suggestions for creating better university experiences for coming generations.

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