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Shajadul Alam Sweet & Md. Nurul Kabir Emon

Abstract: Bangladesh is facing a crisis with many students dying by suicide each year, resulting in hundreds of young lives lost. This study investigates how schools and the media in Bangladesh discuss these tragedies and how their language often blames individuals while hiding deeper, structural problems. The research uses Critical Discourse Analysis and draws on concepts from Self-Determination Theory, Labeling Theory, and Foucault's idea of disciplinary power. It examines statements from schools, media reports, and official documents about four well-known student suicide cases between 2020 and 2025. The findings reveal a consistent pattern, which the study names the "suicide script." In this pattern, failure in school is viewed as a moral failing, mental health issues are overlooked, schools avoid responsibility, and cultural notions of honor and shame increase students' risk. Even mental health programs, especially in elite schools, often function as tools that compel students to change themselves to fit harmful systems rather than challenge them. This research contributes to critical sociology of education, particularly within postcolonial South Asian contexts, by examining how institutional discourse frames student suicide. The findings also invite comparison with achievement-oriented educational systems elsewhere. It demonstrates that language seeming caring can be a subtle form of control used by institutions. The study urges careful reflection on how schools frame these issues, as their approach not only mirrors but also sustains harmful systems, particularly in countries like Bangladesh.

Keywords: student suicide, therapeutic individualism, discursive violence, critical discourse analysis, Bangladesh, educational inequality

1. Introduction

Bangladesh faces a shocking student suicide crisis with 310 deaths in 2024, following 513 suicides in 2023 and 532 in 2022. Most victims are teens aged 13-19 (The Financial Express, 2025; The Daily Star, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, 2023; Rose, 2023). The May 2022 case of Imam Hossain shows this crisis clearly. Hossain was a Computer Science student at the University of Asia Pacific (UAP). UAP offers comprehensive mental health services, including a social counselling center, stress management workshops, and counselling. However, Hossain still died by suicide due to personal conflicts and depression. Teachers saw he was struggling, but the help systems failed to save him. Despite this massive crisis, very few studies look at how schools, media, and culture talk about student suicide in Bangladesh. Most research shows numbers and connections between factors. However, no one studies how the way we talk about these deaths affects what people think about them (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Bangladesh's schools create a challenging environment where good test scores and adherence to rules often serve as measures of success. This affects students' basic need for freedom, feeling capable, and connecting with others, and overall, the need to feel good (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students die by suicide, people usually blame the student instead of looking at the problems that lie deeply rooted in the system. This means help goes to fixing individual students instead of fixing the broken system. This eventually hurts students, families, and communities dealing with mental health problems. This research fills these gaps by studying how people talk about student suicide in Bangladesh. We use the term "therapeutic individualism" to describe a specific discursive pattern observed in institutional communications in our data, not as a universal diagnosis of all mental health programming. Its applicability beyond this context requires further investigation. The study thoroughly investigates specific cases from UAP, Dhaka University, the Rajshahi SSC student case, and DUET. It examines how people and schools describe student suicide, finds the hidden beliefs behind these descriptions, and shows how schools with mental health services might make problems worse instead of better. Using specialized analysis methods and psychological theories, this study helps us understand how everyday language and school practices can conceal unfair treatment while placing individual students solely responsible for the blame. It offers insights that help both Bangladesh and other countries understand how schools talk about student problems.

2. Literature Review

This review examines how schools and society discuss student mental health issues. It focuses on cultural politics and power in institutions. Instead of seeing student suicide as mainly a mental health issue, this review uses critical ideas to examine how schools, media, and cultural stories serve specific political goals while ignoring how unfair systems hurt students.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Educational Power Relations

Critical Discourse Analysis reveals how schools utilize language to maintain power while appearing fair and neutral (Fairclough, 2010). Van Dijk's (2001) ideas illustrate how school stories legitimize existing power structures while rendering student pain as illegitimate. When it comes to students' mental health, studying language reveals how caring words often shift blame onto individuals and away from unfair systems (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Bangladeshi newspaper coverage has demonstrated victim-blaming patterns, with reports emphasizing victims' lifestyle, occupation, identity, and relationships rather than broader structural factors (Islam & Siddique, 2023). This illustrates what Bourdieu (1977) referred to as "symbolic violence"—the use of cultural meanings to normalize and render inequality appear inevitable. These language tricks serve important political goals. They divert attention away from broken school systems while maintaining public trust in school authorities. Recent research in *Discourse* shows how schools now employ what Clarke and Davidson (2023) refer to as "caring control." These are clever language tricks that maintain power through seemingly helpful words, which make the school authority appear as kind guidance rather than unfair control. The connection between media stories and school power is clearly shown in how education leaders respond to student problems. Policy papers often emphasize the importance of following rules and individual responsibility while downplaying the role of school duties in promoting student well-being. This illustrates what Foucault (1975) referred to as disciplinary power operating through seemingly caring school practices.

2.2 Educational Psychology Within Systems of Cultural Domination

Traditional school psychology has provided us with valuable insights into student motivation and well-being. However, critical scholars argue that psychological ideas often overlook the role of politics in school problems by focusing on individual weaknesses instead of unfair systems (Apple, 2004). Self-Determination Theory discusses autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key concepts for understanding student motivation. However, we must examine these psychological needs within the broader context of cultural politics and school power (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Nevertheless, Bangladesh's school system overlooks these psychological needs by prioritiz-

ing memorization over critical thinking and reasoning. It employs grading systems that normalize inequality and foster competitive environments that undermine student unity (Bureau et al., 2012). However, instead of viewing these as school "problems" that require technical fixes, critical analysis reveals how these practices serve specific political goals. They produce obedient individuals, maintain social hierarchy, and ensure cultural control (Giroux, 2001). The problem of "toxic perfectionism" in achievement-focused societies shows broader cultural politics around merit and social mobility. Research shows that 67% of Bangladeshi students associate their self-worth with exam scores. This reveals how school language successfully puts market thinking into student identity (Hossain & Rahman, 2019). This psychological absorption serves political goals by making structural inequality appear to stem from individual merit rather than unfair advantages.

2.3 Cultural Capital, Colonial Legacies, and Educational Stratification

Bourdieu's ideas about cultural capital demonstrate how schools perpetuate class differences through seemingly fair academic practices (Bourdieu, 1977). In Bangladesh, students from English-medium schools are disproportionately represented in elite universities, despite comprising only 12% of the total student population. This illustrates how language and cultural advantages can translate into educational privilege (Karim & Sultana, 2013). This ranking reveals a deeper colonial history, where English education continues to signify an elite status. This creates mental pressure on students who lack such cultural advantages. The mix of cultural capital and regional inequality reveals how school language serves the larger political goal of maintaining urban-rural differences. Rural students feel that exams are "impossible to pass." This does not reveal individual sickness but demonstrates an understanding of systematic disadvantage (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). When 63% of rural students say they have "no control over outcomes," this shows an accurate view of structural reality rather than mental problems.

2.4 Surveillance, Discipline, and the Production of Educational Subjects

Foucault's ideas about disciplinary power offer us key insights into how schools shape certain types of individuals while maintaining social order (Foucault, 1975). Schools function like "panopticons," where constant surveillance enables students to self-regulate their behavior. Exams function as "ceremonies of power" that sort and rank students, a phenomenon that resonates with Bangladesh's national exam system. This power play undermines the complex human ability to assess scores that determine life paths, while appearing fair and merit-based on the surface. The mental cost of disciplinary power is clearly shown in how students respond to school surveillance. Research conducted on obsessive grade checking and harsh self-criti-

cism reveals how students take school demands into their sense of self. This makes fighting back appear as personal failure rather than a political choice (Sultana, 2021). This absorption serves key political goals by making structural violence appear to stem from individual weakness. Recent research has found "therapeutic governance" as a new form of disciplinary power. Here, schools use mental health language to keep control while looking progressive and caring (Rose, 1999). This illustrates a nuanced form of biopower, where psychological well-being becomes a site for school management rather than absolute freedom. Building on this analysis, Thompson and Reid (2022) argue in *Discourse* that today's schools have moved beyond traditional disciplinary methods. They now use "therapeutic governance" that takes over progressive mental health language while keeping fundamental power differences. This creates what they call "empowering subjugation", where student agency gets celebrated in words while being limited in structure.

2.5 Postcolonial Perspectives and Global South Educational Discourse

Critical scholars argue that the primary ideas for understanding student mental health often reflect Western psychological beliefs that may not be applicable to contexts in the Global South (Fanon, 1961). The focus on individual therapy and personal coping methods shows specific cultural beliefs about self and healing. These may not match more group-focused cultural approaches. However, Bangladesh's school language often discusses the complex differences between traditional cultural values and modernizing pressures. Student mental health becomes a place where these tensions get worked out. The combination of family honor, academic achievement, and individual psychology generates distinct forms of cultural pressure. These issues necessitate an analysis that extends beyond Western psychological perspectives (Mahmud, Rahman, & Khan, 2024).

2.6 Gaps in Existing Literature and Research Contribution

Despite growing attention to student mental health worldwide, a complete critical analysis of how school language builds student suicide stories remains limited. This is especially true in the context of the Global South. Current research has shown a strong link between statistical patterns and psychological connections. However, it has not yet examined how school stories, media reports, and cultural language serve specific political goals while shaping the public understanding of student pain. Most importantly, current literature has not adequately explained how schools adopt progressive mental health language to maintain existing power structures while appearing responsive to student needs. This study fills these gaps by examining how "therapeutic individualism" operates as a form of cultural politics that serves school interests while sidestepping structural analysis. The careful analysis of language patterns across different school contexts shows how

seemingly local problems reflect broader methods of cultural control. These approaches may work across diverse school systems facing similar pressures to maintain authority while appearing progressive and student-centered.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs an interdisciplinary framework that combines Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Labeling Theory, and Foucauldian concepts of surveillance and discipline to examine the intersection of structural unfairness, language practices, and psychological needs. This creates conditions that render student pain appear normal while obscuring systemic blame. These theories collectively reveal the social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms that shape student suicide talk in Bangladesh.

3.1 Self-Determination Theory: Systematic Thwarting of Psychological Needs

Self-Determination Theory posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universal psychological needs that all individuals require for well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Bangladesh's school system blocks these needs in systematic ways. This creates conditions that research shows increase mental pain and suicide risk:

- *Autonomy suppression* happens through rigid courses that focus on memorizing instead of critical thinking. This leaves students under the control of others, rather than allowing them to be self-directed. The UAP case shows this problem clearly. Despite mental health programs that stress "self-healing," students like Hossain stayed trapped in inflexible school structures that denied real choice.
- *Competence erosion* happens through high-stakes exams that frame school failure as a permanent moral problem instead of a situational challenge. Even with UAP's stress management workshops, underlying competitive systems continue to erode students' effectiveness through comparison evaluation systems.
- *Relatedness deprivation* results from competitive environments that isolate students from peers and mentors. The Rajshahi case clearly shows this, as victims' peers avoided working together due to academic rivalry.

SDT's focus on inner motivation highlights how Bangladesh's external reward systems, such as public rankings and conditional parental love, can replace curiosity with anxiety. This is similar to brain research that shows controlled motivation activates stress-responsive brain areas (Singh & Kumar, 2022).

3.2 Labeling Theory: Constructing Deviance and Moral Failure

Labeling Theory shows that deviance comes from society's reactions rather than the acts themselves (Becker, 1963). Bangladesh schools and media turn academic struggles into moral categories by labeling poor-performing students as "lazy," "undisciplined," or "mentally weak." The primary deviance of poor grades becomes secondary deviance when labels redefine a student's identity, altering their self-perception. This triggers self-fulfilling prophecies, where students absorb stigmatized identities and withdraw from support systems (Link & Phelan, 2001). The UAP case sheds light on this. Despite the school knowing about Hossain's pain, post-incident stories focused on personal conflicts instead of looking at how labeling processes helped cause marginalization. Media analysis shows 44% of suicide reports stress victims' "lack of effort," while ignoring school neglect. This keeps blame cycles going as it links suicides to individual weakness and empowers authorities to deflect examination from structural unfairness. This makes structural violence invisible through moral talk.

3.3 Foucauldian Discipline: Surveillance and Panoptic Control

Foucault's analysis reveals how Bangladeshi schools function as panopticons, where constant surveillance enables students to self-monitor and regulate their behavior (Foucault, 1975). Schools enforce strict timetables, uniform codes, and public rankings that foster institutional control from within. Exams serve as "ceremonies of power." They categorize students as successes or failures while appearing objective and merit-based.

The 2020 Dhaka University case showed obsessive grade self-checking, reflecting panoptic absorption. Disciplinary power is evident in schools silencing emotional expression as "disruptive." This can make natural stress responses appear like sickness. The UAP case demonstrates that even schools with mental health resources maintain disciplinary frameworks. Workshops on "Burn-Out Management" frame psychological pain as individual problems needing personal management instead of symptoms of problematic school cultures. Foucault's concept of biopower helps explain why Bangladesh's education policies prioritize productivity measures over mental health infrastructure. Only 0.44% of the health budget goes to psychological services (Rahman, Haque, & Begum, 2021).

3.4 Theoretical Integration: Interlocking Systems of Oppression

These theories show Bangladesh's student suicide crisis as kept alive by connected systems: structural blocking of psychological needs (SDT) enforced through watching mechanisms (Foucault), language erasure of systemic violence through moral labeling (Labeling Theory), and cultural reinforcement through honor-shame frameworks that increase conformity pressure. For example, students struggling academically (competence blocked) are often labeled "lazy" (moral deviance) and face public shaming

(disciplinary power). This leads to suicides framed as "weakness" instead of institutional failure. The UAP case clearly shows this three-part system. Despite mental health resources, Hossain's pain was linked to personal conflicts instead of a systematic look at institutional structures.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework Integration: Mechanisms of Educational Oppression

Theory	Mechanism	Function	Evidence
SDT	Thwarting autonomy, competence, and relatedness	Creates psychological distress	UAP: Inflexible structures despite mental health programming
Labeling Theory	Moral categorization of academic struggles	Individualizes systemic problems	DUET: "Character flaws" rather than support needs
Foucauldian Discipline	Surveillance and normalization	Internalizes institutional control	DU: Obsessive self-monitoring documented in the victim's diary

This combined framework gives analytical tools for critiquing stories that reduce suicide to personal sickness while highlighting systematic structural oppression working through language, watching, and cultural reinforcement. The framework illustrates how individual psychological pain stems from coordinated school mechanisms designed to maintain power relations while appearing caring and supportive.

4. The research

4.1 Research Questions

1. How does Bangladeshi educational discourse systematically deploy "discursive violence" to construct student suicides as individual moral failures while rendering structural inequities invisible across media and institutional contexts?
2. What mechanisms of cultural politics and institutional power enable educational authorities to maintain hierarchical domination through apparently caring narratives that obscure their role in producing student psychological distress?
3. How do coordinated discursive strategies - moralization, therapeutic erasure, and labeling - function as sophisticated tools of educational oppression that marginalize student emotional needs while protecting institutional authority from meaningful accountability?
4. In what ways do institutions with progressive mental health programming (such as UAP) deploy "therapeutic individualism" to co-opt mental

health discourse in service of conservative institutional purposes, and how does this reveal the evolution of disciplinary power in neoliberal educational contexts?

5. How do the systematic patterns of discursive violence identified in Bangladesh illuminate broader mechanisms of cultural imperialism operating through Western psychological frameworks imposed on Global South educational contexts, and what does this reveal about the need for decolonizing educational discourse?

4.2 Methodology

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how school and media language construct student suicide as an individual sickness while obscuring structural violence within Bangladesh's school system. The methodological approach recognizes language as both reflecting and creating social reality, positioning language practices as sites of political struggle over meaning and school authority (Fairclough, 2010).

4.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis Framework

The analysis follows Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model. Textual analysis (first dimension) focused on lexical and grammatical choices - including passive versus active voice, evaluative language, and metaphorical framing - to identify how documents constructed responsibility and agency. Discursive practice analysis (second dimension) examined how texts were produced and circulated within specific institutional genres, revealing how different actors (schools, media, families) used distinct language strategies to deflect accountability. Social practice analysis (third dimension) connected language patterns to broader cultural and political contexts, examining how language legitimizes inequality and maintains institutional power. This layered approach enables systematic investigation of how seemingly neutral school language serves political functions while marginalizing student experiences.

- *Textual analysis* focuses on word choices, grammar structures, and rhetorical devices that build interpretations of student pain. Specific attention goes to passive versus active voice constructions, evaluative language, and metaphorical frameworks that position responsibility and agency.
- *Discursive practice* examines how texts get produced within specific school contexts and genre conventions. This reveals how different social actors (schools, media outlets, families) use distinct language strategies to keep authority while deflecting accountability.
- *Social practice* connects language patterns to broader cultural and political contexts. It examines how language serves as a tool for social reproduction, legitimizing inequality, and maintaining institutional power within Bangladesh's educational hierarchy.

4.3 Data Collection and Case Selection

The study employed purposeful sampling to identify the most suitable sources for addressing the research questions. It examined public materials created between 2020 and 2025. The data comprises 47 news stories from top Bangladeshi media, 23 official documents, and 34 public stories, including social media posts and opinion pieces. Four main cases guide the study: the 2020 Dhaka University case (a public university), the 2022 Rajshahi SSC student (a high school), the 2023 DUET engineering student (a technical college), and the 2022 UAP case involving Imam Hossain (a private university with mental health programs). Case selection followed three explicit criteria. First, institutional diversity: cases represent public and private universities, a technical institute, and a secondary school, ensuring coverage across educational levels and resource contexts. Second, temporal spread: the source materials span 2020–2025, while the four focal cases occurred between 2020 and 2023, capturing both pre- and post-pandemic institutional discourse. Third, public visibility: each case generated substantial documented media coverage and official responses, providing sufficient textual data for systematic CDA. The UAP case was additionally selected as a theoretically important contrast case: as an institution with explicit mental health programming, it allows direct examination of how ostensibly progressive language can nonetheless serve conservative institutional purposes - what the study terms "therapeutic individualism."

4.4 Analytical Process

The analysis proceeded through four explicit steps; each linked to Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional CDA model. (1) Open coding of all 104 texts to identify language features - word choice, modality, and voice - corresponding to textual analysis (first dimension). (2) Focused coding to group recurring patterns such as moral attribution, service enumeration, and euphemistic framing, corresponding to discursive practice analysis (second dimension). (3) Cross-case comparison to assess pattern consistency across school types, regions, and resource levels. (4) Interpretive analysis connecting patterns to the broader theoretical framework - SDT, Labeling Theory, and Foucauldian concepts - corresponding to social practice analysis (third dimension). Constant comparison was used throughout, with new data checked against emerging patterns to refine coding categories.

Critical discourse analysis necessitates transparency regarding our views and potential biases. As researchers studying school language and culture, we know our experiences and beliefs shape our analysis. This helps us see things in new ways, but we must also consider how our backgrounds influence our work. We use only publicly available materials, so we do not communicate directly with individuals. Still, we must care about sensitive topics,

especially when they involve tragic events. Our analysis acknowledges the pain people experience while aiming to prevent future harm and promote positive change.

We employed several methods to strengthen our analysis. First, we read all materials many times to find language patterns and context. We examined various sources, including official papers, news reports, and public stories from 2020 to 2025, to gather multiple perspectives. We shared our first findings with education experts in Bangladesh for their feedback. We also consulted language experts from other countries to validate our findings. Rather than relying on traditional measures of validity, we focused on three key criteria. First, *credibility* involved checking whether our findings were consistent with the experiences and observations of local experts. Second, *transferability* examined whether the findings could be applied to similar contexts or situations. Third, *confirmability* ensured that our conclusions were supported by sufficient evidence rather than personal opinions or assumptions. By following these principles, we strengthened the trustworthiness of our study while remaining aligned with our research objectives.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and limitation

This study utilized only public documents, news reports, and official statements. We did not conduct interviews with individuals, so we did not require IRB approval. We approached sensitive topics like student suicide with care and respect. We refrained from speculating about anyone's reasons or mental health. We identified institutions for public accountability but did not use any personal data or private messages. Our goal is to highlight systemic issues, rather than assigning blame to any individual or group. We maintained ethical and responsible practices in our work.

The use of public sources also shaped the scope and limitations of the study. First, the analysis did not include private communications between schools, teachers, students, or families, which may reveal additional ways in which institutional power is exercised. Second, the study focused only on English-language materials and did not examine Bengali-language discussions, where concepts such as *shorom* (shame) may carry different cultural meanings and influence how student experiences are framed. Third, the research covered the period from 2020 to 2025, allowing the study to identify recent trends while not examining the historical development of educational discourse, including the continuing influence of colonial-era policies. Finally, although the detailed analysis of cases such as Dhaka University provided valuable insights, the findings may not be generalizable to all educational institutions in Bangladesh. These limitations define the scope of the study while keeping the focus on its central objective of examining how public educational discourse contributes to the maintenance of institutional power.

5. Result

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) showed that schools and media in Bangladesh often call student suicide a personal failure. They do not discuss larger issues, such as unequal access to resources or unsafe campuses. They use formal words to avoid blame and discuss family honor, shifting the focus away from school responsibility. These patterns appear in all the cases and news reports we studied, showing that this is a common way of talking, not just a few separate cases.

5.1 Moralization and Labeling: Constructing Academic Deviance

A notable pattern we observed is that schools and media frequently turn academic struggles into moral judgments. They give students lasting negative labels. In our study, 89% of news reports used words that blamed students' character for low grades, rather than examining broader systemic problems. In 73% of these reports, the language was direct, using words like "lazy," "unfocused," or "irresponsible" to describe struggling students. The UAP case is a clear example of this moralizing language. The university's official statement said, "Despite having access to comprehensive counseling services, the student failed to seek proper help, showing a lack of personal responsibility" (UAP Official Statement, May 23, 2022). This statement frames Hossain's death as a personal failure, suggesting that the university did enough and that any problem was the student's fault. The Rajshahi SSC case also used strong moral language: "The boy was not serious about his studies and spent too much time on mobile games… His lack of dedication ultimately led to poor results and family disappointment" (The Daily Star, March 15, 2022). Here, the student's struggles are attributed to his attitude and choices, rather than to any outside factors. At the same time, schools use labels that stick with students, turning short-term problems into fixed parts of their identity. In the DUET case, the student was first described as "experiencing challenges with engineering coursework" in September 2022. By September 2023, this had changed to "problematic student unable to adapt to university environment despite multiple interventions." Media coverage reinforced these labels, labeling him a "behavioral problem" and stating that he had been "flagged" since his second semester (Campus Today, September 12, 2023). Words like "flagged" and "behavioral problem" suggest that the student will always be a problem, rather than someone facing temporary difficulties. This kind of labeling can lead students to internalize negative self-identities, making them less likely to seek help and more likely to feel isolated. While the causal relationship between labeling and student outcomes cannot be established through discourse analysis alone, the pattern of language escalation across official DUET communications suggests a discursive environment that would make help-seeking significantly more difficult.

5.2 Systematic Erasure of Mental Health Discourse

Despite Bangladesh's growing mental health awareness, institutional and media discourse systematically avoids psychological terminology, frameworks, or trauma-informed language. Content analysis revealed that 91% of institutional statements avoided psychological explanations entirely, demonstrating coordinated therapeutic erasure that serves political functions by preventing the analysis of institutional environments that contribute to student distress. Psychological explanation was operationalized as any statement referencing mental health conditions, emotional distress, or psychological needs; language attributing outcomes solely to personal choices, academic performance, or family issues was coded as avoidance.

The Dhaka University case exemplified this erasure: "The university maintains strict academic standards essential for educational excellence. Students who cannot meet requirements must take personal responsibility for their academic journey" (DU Registrar's Office, April 3, 2020). This statement completely avoids psychological explanations despite a documented history of depression. The UAP case presents a particularly complex therapeutic erasure occurring within an institution explicitly promoting mental health programming. Despite having psychological assessment capabilities, institutional statements avoided psychological frameworks: "While comprehensive mental health support was available, students must take initiative to access services and apply coping strategies effectively" (UAP Press Release, May 22, 2022). Media coverage reinforced systematic avoidance with 91% of reports avoiding psychological terminology, 78% using euphemisms like "personal problems," and zero percent discussing trauma-informed approaches. This erasure serves crucial political functions by preventing examination of how institutional structures systematically thwart psychological needs while maintaining the illusion that individual weakness causes student distress.

5.3 Institutional Defensiveness and Cultural Honor-Shame Reinforcement

All institutional responses demonstrated consistent accountability deflection while emphasizing existing policies and cultural frameworks, intensifying individual responsibility. Statistical analysis revealed that 87% of institutional statements emphasized existing support services, 91% avoided acknowledging systemic inadequacies, and none of the institutional statements in the data corpus committed to structural changes, though the study's purposeful sample cannot establish how representative this is of Bangladeshi institutions more broadly. UAP exemplified sophisticated defensiveness through comprehensive enumeration: "The University maintains comprehensive mental health support through our Social Counselling Centre, conducting regular workshops on stress management, burn-out pre-

vention, and mental health literacy" (UAP Press Release, May 23, 2022). This demonstrates defensiveness through service enumeration while avoiding effectiveness analysis. DUET employed responsibility reversal: "The student was provided multiple opportunities to improve performance and behavioral compliance. Unfortunately, some individuals cannot adapt to university life despite institutional support" (DUET Academic Office, September 10, 2023). The phrase "cannot adapt" transforms institutional inflexibility into individual pathology.

Educational discourse intersects systematically with South Asian honor-shame constructions, appearing in 67% of media coverage and 43% of family statements. The Rajshahi family statement exemplified this reinforcement: "Our son brought shame to our family name through his poor performance. His decision has brought dishonor to our community and disappointed everyone who believed in him" (Family spokesperson, Prothom Alo, March 16, 2022). Media coverage consistently reinforced these frameworks: "Academic success reflects family values and parental guidance. This tragic incident reminds us of the importance of instilling proper values and work ethic in our children" (Editorial, The Daily Star, March 18, 2022). Cross-case analysis revealed 67% of media reports connected academic performance to family reputation, 78% used collective disappointment language, and 89% of cultural commentary reinforced pressure rather than questioning systemic appropriateness. This cultural reinforcement serves political functions by naturalizing academic pressure as a cultural necessity while deflecting attention from institutional responsibility.

5.4 Therapeutic Individualism: Sophisticated Co-optation of Progressive Discourse

The UAP case highlights the most complex way that institutions use language to keep control while appearing supportive of students' mental health. Unlike other cases where mental health is ignored, UAP strategically uses mental health language. This approach appears to demonstrate that the university prioritizes student well-being, but in reality, it shifts all responsibility onto the students themselves. For example, the "Healing Own-Self" workshop materials from UAP told students, "Students must learn to identify their stress triggers and develop personal coping mechanisms to succeed in competitive academic environments" (UAP Workshop Manual, 2022). This kind of language borrows words from therapy, but the message is clear: it is students, not the institution, that must adapt to stressful conditions. The "Burn-Out Management" program at UAP took a similar approach, stating, "Students experiencing burnout must take personal responsibility for implementing stress reduction techniques learned in our

workshops" (UAP Mental Health Literacy Session, March 2022). Again, the focus is on students fixing themselves, not on the university changing its demands or environment.

This pattern, known as "therapeutic individualism," is a subtle but powerful way for institutions to keep their authority. Instead of using obvious punishments or strict rules, the university uses the language of care and support to keep students focused on their actions. Students are advised to utilize resources and coping strategies, but there is little discussion about changing the system that causes so much stress in the first place. In this way, mental health workshops and programs can help maintain the same pressures and expectations that lead to student distress. The institution appears modern and caring, but its real effect is to make students responsible for navigating a system that remains unchanged for them. This sophisticated use of psychological language creates the illusion of support while reinforcing the old power structures and discouraging students from demanding real institutional change. This interpretation is based on the discursive framing of the materials themselves; we acknowledge that workshop facilitators may have acted with genuine care, and that the gap between program design and delivery cannot be assessed through text analysis alone.

5.5 Systematic Coordination Across Contexts

These language patterns show up in all types of schools—public and private, urban and rural, secondary and higher education—across Bangladesh. Whether it is UAP's mental health programs, DUET's technical focus, Dhaka University's research setting, or Rajshahi's rural high school, each case employed similar ways of discussing student struggles. This consistency suggests that schools follow a shared cultural script, where student psychological needs are often overlooked and blame is placed on the individual, regardless of the school's location or resources.

Table 2 reveals consistent discursive patterns across the four educational cases despite substantial differences in educational level, institutional type, and resource availability. The recurrence of these strategies across diverse settings suggests that they reflect broader cultural and institutional norms rather than the characteristics of individual schools. Among the cases, UAP exhibits the most complex pattern, combining elements of *therapeutic individualism*, which emphasizes personal responsibility for coping with distress, with more traditional forms of institutional authority.

Across all four cases, schools employ four recurring discursive strategies to maintain institutional authority while presenting themselves as supportive. First, they blame students' attitudes for poor grades instead of system issues. Second, they avoid real talks about mental health problems. Third, they use formal words to dodge responsibility. Fourth, they utilize concepts

like family honor to shift the focus. Even when schools offer help programs, they often advise students to adjust instead of addressing the stressful school conditions. These findings suggest that meaningful reform requires not only the expansion of support services but also critical changes in institutional discourse, organizational culture, and the distribution of responsibility within educational settings.

Table 2 Systematic Discursive Patterns Across Focal Cases

Discursive Pattern	**Dhaka University (Public Higher)**	**Rajshahi SSC (Rural Secondary)**	**DUET Engineering (Technical Higher)**	**UAP Case (Private + Mental Health)**
Moralization & Labeling	✓	✓	✓	✓
Therapeutic Erasure	✓	✓	✓	Paradoxical
Institutional Defensiveness	✓	✓	✓	Sophisticated
Honor-Shame Reinforcement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Therapeutic Individualism	—	—	—	Primary
Systematic Coordination	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: ✓ = Pattern consistently present; — = Pattern absent; Paradoxical = Therapeutic erasure within mental health programming; Sophisticated = Enhanced defensiveness through service enumeration; Primary = Main site of therapeutic individualism deployment.

6. Discussion

This study contributes new insights to critical education research by demonstrating how schools utilize language to exert control over students and maintain their authority. It introduces new ideas, such as therapeutic individualism, and explains how even caring words can help maintain old power systems in place. By highlighting these hidden tactics, the study enables us to understand how schools influence culture and maintain control.

6.1. Therapeutic Individualism: A Novel Framework for Critical Analysis

"Therapeutic individualism" is the key new idea of this study. It illustrates how schools use mental health discussions to appear caring while main-

taining old power structures. Unlike traditional punishment methods, this approach instructs students to manage their stress rather than addressing school-wide issues. In the cases examined here, this discursive pattern appears to allow institutions to retain authority while projecting a supportive image — though whether this dynamic operates intentionally or as an unexamined institutional habit is a question the data cannot definitively resolve.

The concept of "therapeutic individualism" builds on Foucault's concept of biopower by demonstrating how schools and universities utilize mental health language to manage students rather than empowering them to gain autonomy. Instead of addressing stressful environments or unfair workloads, schools offer workshops that teach students to manage stress independently. For example, a university might offer stress management sessions but overlook requests to reduce exam pressure, implying that burnout is the student's fault rather than a systemic issue (Foucault, 1975). This makes schools appear caring while maintaining the same stressful conditions. This approach also aligns with a broader trend in which society treats significant problems as if they were merely personal issues. Schools use terms like "well-being" and "resilience" to appear modern and caring, but these programs often avoid making fundamental changes and retain power within the institution (Rose, 1999). By focusing on personal adjustment rather than group action or changing school rules, therapeutic individualism enables schools to maintain control while appearing student-centered. This idea suggests that caring language can substantially support traditional ways of doing things, and it provides a way to study other schools where leaders want to appear supportive without relinquishing absolute power.

6.2 Discursive Violence and the Machinery of Educational Oppression

This study introduces the idea of "discursive violence" to explain how everyday language in schools and universities hides unfair systems and puts the blame for struggles on individual students. Building on Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence, it shows that what seems like everyday school language actually protects the power of institutions and ignores students' emotional needs. The analysis finds that discursive violence works in several ways at once: moralization turns academic struggles into personal failings, therapeutic erasure avoids mental health reasons that might challenge the school, institutional defensiveness uses legal or official words to avoid blame, and cultural honor-shame makes students feel more pressure by treating stress as a regular part of culture. This idea also utilizes Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony to demonstrate how school language helps maintain unfair systems by rendering them seem normal and unavoidable. The study found these language patterns in all types of schools—urban and rural, public and private—showing they are part of a shared cultural script, not just random

events. By demonstrating how language is used to overlook students' needs and uphold school authority, the study advocates for more substantial changes in school culture, rather than merely addressing minor issues.

6.3 Challenging Self-Determination Theory Through Critical Analysis

While Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and connection for student well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this study argues that these needs are closely tied to broader issues of culture and school power. The findings show that schools often block these needs to keep control. For example, strict rules limit student freedom, grading systems can harm students' sense of skill, and competition can weaken their sense of connection. These actions are not just teaching mistakes—they are used to enforce obedience, maintain social hierarchies, and consolidate power among those in charge. This critical view challenges approaches that only help students adjust without addressing the underlying system. It warns that relying solely on psychological ideas can ultimately enable schools to maintain power by placing all the pressure on students to adapt to their demands. The study calls for solutions that go beyond helping individuals and instead focus on how language, school rules, and cultural habits collectively contribute to student distress. Real change, it argues, means changing the systems and ways of talking that create these problems in the first place.

6.4 Postcolonial Implications and Global South Knowledge Production

This study guides decolonized education research by revealing hidden forms of school control in Bangladesh and the Global South that Western studies often miss. It illustrates how modern schools blend traditional colonial education practices with contemporary pressures to succeed, incorporating cultural concepts such as honor and shame. For example, schools may push students through family reputation pressure while using Western-style mental health programs that focus on personal responsibility, even when community values are more collective. The idea of "therapeutic individualism" (using Western mental health ideas) acts as a form of cultural control. By telling students to cope alone, these approaches overlook how stress often stems from broken systems or cultural clashes, rather than personal failure. The study warns that using Western therapy models without local input can perpetuate existing power imbalances. For instance, schools might offer stress workshops but overlook unsafe campuses or unfair grading practices. This work joins global efforts to decolonize psychology and education by showing how even "helpful" programs can protect unfair systems instead of changing them. While this pattern is visible in our Bangladeshi cases, we do not claim that all Western-origin mental health frameworks function this way; context-specific adaptation and critique remain essential.

6.5. Indications for Critical Discourse Analysis

This study examines the role of school language at three levels: daily classroom talks, cultural stories, and global education trends. It proves that how schools talk about students creates patterns that push out or ignore learners across many places. For example, everyday actions like labeling students or using honor-shame language are linked to larger cultural power struggles and the management of education. This reveals how everyday words and rules connect to wider power systems that shape students' lives everywhere. The concept of "therapeutic individualism" (utilizing caring language to maintain control) provides researchers with new avenues for studying schools. It helps experts understand how terms like "well-being" or "resilience" enable students to solve problems independently, rather than switching schools. This addresses recent calls for improved research tools, highlighting how modern school systems often conceal conservative goals behind seemingly supportive language. The work urges more studies to expose and challenge these hidden forms of school power.

6.6 Broader Contributions to Critical Education Theory

This study's findings about schools using moral blame, hiding mental health problems, official-sounding words, cultural pressure, and fake support are not just about Bangladesh. Schools worldwide likely use these tactics to appear helpful while maintaining power. While this study focuses on Bangladesh, the analytical framework of therapeutic individualism may offer a useful lens for examining how other achievement-oriented systems respond to student distress - question future comparative research could pursue. The research provides experts with new ways to identify when schools conceal power struggles behind seemingly progressive initiatives, such as mental health programs. By highlighting how terms like "resilience training" or "student wellness" can mask control, it advocates for breaking down systems that prioritize order over student needs. This work contributes to global education reform efforts, demonstrating that genuine change requires exposing how the concept of "care" can be used to perpetuate unfair systems.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights how school language in Bangladesh often frames student suicide as a personal moral failure, while hiding deeper problems in the system. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, along with ideas from Self-Determination Theory, Labeling Theory, and Foucault, the research reveals that seemingly neutral or caring language perpetuates harmful systems and shields schools from genuine accountability. The analysis focuses on five main patterns of "discursive violence": turning academic struggles into char-

acter flaws, ignoring mental health reasons, using official language to avoid blame, reinforcing that honor and shame increase family pressure, and labeling students in ways that turn short-term problems into lasting identities.

Most importantly, the study highlights "therapeutic individualism," where schools use mental health language to look modern and caring but still expect students to adjust to stress instead of changing stressful conditions themselves. The UAP case is a clear example of how programs like "Healing Own-Self" and "Burn-Out Management" utilize therapy terms but maintain a focus on individual coping rather than addressing the root causes of distress (UAP, 2022a, 2022b). Across all cases studied, these patterns were consistent, indicating that the marginalization of student psychological needs is a systemic phenomenon, not isolated to a single institution or region. This study makes three primary contributions. First, it introduces and empirically grounds the concept of "therapeutic individualism" as a distinct mode of institutional discourse that deploys mental health language for normalization rather than transformation. Second, it extends Critical Discourse Analysis to student suicide discourse in a South Asian context, demonstrating that the "suicide script" is systemic rather than incidental. Third, it offers an integrated analytical framework - combining SDT, Labeling Theory, and Foucauldian analysis - that may inform future comparative work on how educational institutions respond discursively to student distress. The study's scope is bounded by its focus on publicly available Bangladeshi institutional texts; broader application of these concepts calls for further empirical investigation.

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