

Rethinking University Admission: Students' Perceptions of the General, Science and Technology (GST) Examination System in Bangladesh

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Research Article

Keywords: university admission, higher education, student perceptions, assessment

Posted Date: October 21st, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11101782/v1>

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Rethinking University Admission: Students' Perceptions of the General, Science and Technology (GST) Examination System in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study examines students' perceptions of the General, Science & Technology (GST) integrated admission system for public university admission in Bangladesh. Based on constructivist learning theory, educational assessment theory, and expectancy-value theory, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was applied. Quantitative data were collected from 368 undergraduate students across six public universities using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.903$), followed by qualitative Focus Group Discussions with 48 participants to contextualize statistical findings. Results indicate that GST is simplified, cost-efficient, and improves accessibility and logistical ease. However, there are fears of excessive use of multiple-choice questions, insufficient holistic testing, psychological stresses of one high-stakes examination, and inefficient migration and merit practices. Although most students report moderate to high satisfaction and perceive the system as relatively fair, they recommend complementary assessment methods and greater transparency. Findings suggest GST's long-term legitimacy depends on stronger pedagogical validity, governance coordination, and student-centred reform.

Keywords: university admission; higher education; student perceptions; assessment

21 **Introduction**

22 University admission tests are important determinants of academic prospects and higher education access to students
23 (Zhang, 2025). Such tests are globally designed to measure academic readiness, subject competence, and aptitude of
24 tertiary education in the midst of competition to a limited number of university places (Alotaibi et al., 2016).
25 Nevertheless, because of the high stakes, it causes significant stress and anxiety in students, which affect the strategies
26 of academic preparation, future educational goals, and mental health (Yatkin et al., 2023).

27 In the last 20 years, the rapid expansion of the higher education sector in Bangladesh has been supported by
28 population, demand for skilled human capital, and socioeconomic factors growth (Rahman et al., 2024; Mannan,
29 2017).Currently, there are around 175 universities in Bangladesh, 56 public, 116 private and 3 international (UGC,
30 2025; Akhter, 2023).Despite the growth in the number of universities, the public university system still remains the
31 most preferred due to the lower cost, higher academic standing and better employment prospects (Chakrabarty, 2025).
32 Although the number of institutional is increasing, there is a harsh scarcity of access to the public university (Al-
33 Mamun et al., 2024; Bhuia et al., 2016). Approximately 3.2 million higher secondary graduates are estimated to be
34 seeking entry to tertiary institutions every year (Mannan, 2017), but a small fraction of applicants can gain admission
35 to public universities (Rumman et al., 2025).

36 In Bangladesh, admission to public universities has conventionally been based on institution-specific
37 examinations, where students are expected to take several tests in a short time (Rahman et al., 2024). The University
38 Grants Commission (UGC) implemented the GST (General, Science and Technology) integrated admission
39 examination system to overcome the issue of administrative complexity, financial load, inequity, and student stress
40 (Rumman et al., 2025). This cluster model allows more than one university to hold a common admission test by a
41 centralized application process. In 2023, more than 300,000 students took part in GST exams of 22 public universities,
42 which is a significant change in the higher education admissions in the country (Rahman et al., 2024).

43 The existing literature shows, advocates believe that it can decrease redundancy, costs, and logistical
44 difficulties, and critics express their concerns about fairness, transparency, relevancy in subjects, and the pressure of
45 having a single and decisive examination (Islam, 2022). These controversies indicate that structured research into the
46 perceptions of the students is necessary because students are the major stakeholders who directly feel the impact of
47 this policy. Despite the comprehensive research on admission examination internationally, especially with respect to

test anxiety, motivation, equity, and access to higher education (Roy et al., 2024; Rabby et al., 2023; Yarkin et al., 2023) there is limited research on integrated or cluster-based admission systems (Rumman et al., 2025).

The empirical studies of the GST examination system are emerging (Rahman et al., 2024). The current literature is mostly descriptive or policy-based, and there is little evidence that the lived experiences of students, their satisfaction levels, and their perceived system efficiency are evaluated (Nafiu, 2021). Limited information is available regarding how students understand the GST mechanism and how it can impact the choice of university and how they perceive fairness in relation to earlier models of admission (Rumman et al., 2025).

Theoretical Perspectives Informing the Study

This research is based on constructivist learning theory (Harasim, 2017) and educational assessment theory (Gipps, 2011) that are interconnected to create a sound theoretical foundation of investigating perceptions of students toward the GST examination system (Struyven et al., 2005). The constructivist theory focuses on the idea that learners actively construct meaning in the form of experiences, social interaction, and reflection (Spooner, 2015; Zhu and Atompag, 2023). In high-stakes testing, students are not merely meant to perceive what is on the test but also what they experience in their lives in preparation, stress, competition, and institutional processes (Kaleta, 2025; Smyth and Banks, 2012).

Educational assessment theory also emphasizes the complex nature of exams in determining learning, motivation, as well as educational opportunities (Levy-Feldman, 2025). High-stakes assessments do not only act as instruments of assessment, but also serve as a mechanism that points to institutional values associated with meritocracy, fairness, and academic quality (Stobart and Eggen, 2012). The perception towards these tests by students can hence affect individual performance as well as the overall system performance (Jones, 2018). Also, the expectancy-value theory (Raynor, 2021) provides an understanding of motivation and interest to the GST system among students. Based on this theory, the performance and effort of students depend on their expectation of success and the perceived worth of admission (Nagle, 2021). The perception of equity, openness, and applicability in the GST system can therefore have a direct influence on motivation, stress, and satisfaction of students (Rahman et al., 2024).

Students' Experiences with High-Stakes Admission Examinations

There is a significant amount of international literature that suggests that university admission examinations are commonly linked to an increase in stress, anxiety, and psychological pressure in students (Al-Mamun et al., 2024;

Pienyu et al., 2024). The lengthy preparation time, high competition, and not knowing what will happen have been associated with emotional distress and, in others, depressive symptoms in adolescents making higher education preparations (Rabby et al., 2023).

Admission examinations are considered to be one of the most stressful stages of the academic life of Bangladesh students (Hossain and Halder, 2025). A lot of students have to depend on the individual coaching, as well as formal education, which leads to hard hours of work, which adds to the stress. On the one hand, coaching can contribute to preparedness, but, on the other hand, inequality is also promoted because access is strongly associated with socioeconomic status (Rahman et al., 2024). Studies also show that the perception of fairness and curriculum alignment determines learning strategies and motivation in students (Pye et al., 2025). The perceived unfairness can result in frustration, lack of engagement and superficial learning styles (Dong and Liu, 2022).

Empirical Evidence on the GST Admission System

Even though the GST examination is increasingly becoming a prominent phenomenon in Bangladesh, there is the lack of empirical studies that discuss specifically the perception of students (Rumman et al., 2025). The available research and reports have mostly focused on the administrative efficiency, policy debates, and logistical issues, instead of the lived experiences of students (Chakrabarty, 2025).

According to some researchers, the GST system has not met its desired objectives of lightening the load on the students (Rahman et al., 2024). Studies reveal that students still have to spend considerable amounts of money on travel, admission confirmation, enrollment cancelation, and multiple interviews or viva exams in various universities (Rosan, 2020). These contribute to further financial and mental stress, especially in the case of students with rural or low-income backgrounds (Nafiu, 2021). There have also been worries on how assessment should be standardized across institutions that provide different academic programs (Rumman et al., 2025). Critics claim that one test is not always suitable to reflect subject-specific skills needed in one university by different universities, which can influence academic placement and teaching (Rosan, 2020). Moreover, the fact that prestigious universities, like DU, BUET, JU, and CU, partially switched to the GST system reflects the issues of governance and trust that compromise system-wide uniformity (Islam, 2022).

Research Gap and Rationale

The literature review indicates a major gap in empirical studies that investigate the perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction of the students about the GST admission examination in Bangladesh. Although the literature has addressed exam stress, culture of private coaching and overall admission issues, very little research has addressed the subjective assessment of the GST system as a comprehensive form of admission.

Additionally, the voice of students has been mostly silent in policy discourse on admission reforms. It is important to know how students value the fairness, effectiveness, and availability of the GST system in order to assess its sustainability and make future improvements. In the absence of this evidence, the policy decisions tend to be left out of touch with the realities of the main stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Drawing on the reviewed literature and theoretical perspectives, this study conceptualizes students' perceptions of the GST examination system as shaped by these interrelated factors:

These dimensions interrelate to affect the overall satisfaction levels of students, attitudes, and their perception of the GST system. The analysis of these relations gives a detailed insight of how the system works according to the student's perspective (Fig. 1).

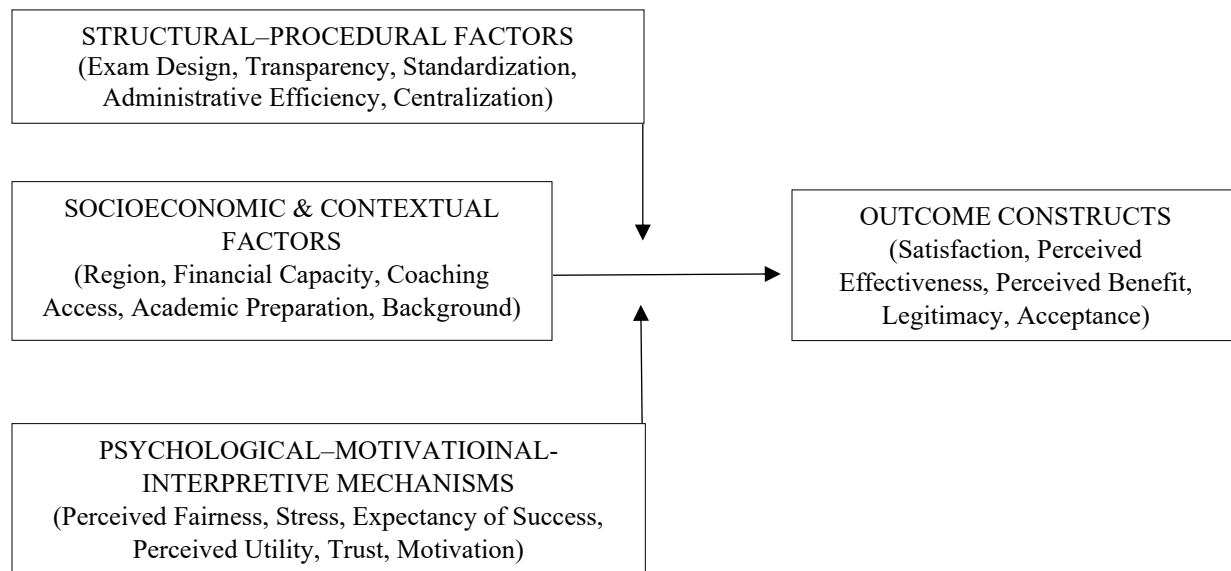


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework of the study

These dimensions interrelate to affect the overall satisfaction levels of students, attitudes, and their perception of the GST system. The analysis of these relations gives a detailed insight of how the system works according to the student's perspective.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of students towards the GST examination system of university admission in Bangladesh in terms of its effectiveness, fairness, and usefulness. The study provides significant contribution to the literature of admission reform in developing-country settings, with its capacity to generate student-centred empirical evidence, which is applicable to policymakers and administrators of higher education in facilitating the use of empirical evidence to enhance the GST system.

The research questions of the study are as follows;

- 1) What are the perceptions of students about GST examination system?
- 2) What are the satisfaction levels of students regarding the GST admission process?
- 3) How do students evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of the GST examination system?
- 4) What improvements do students suggest for the GST examination system?

Method

Research Method

The study incorporated a mixed-methods research that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to get a complete picture of how students perceive the GST examination system. Mixed-method research allows gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data in one study and strengthening the depth of explanations and methodological rigor (Creswell, 2020; Benz and Newman, 2008).

Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-method design was used (Creswell, 2012). The research took place in two stages. At the first stage, a structured survey was carried out to gather quantitative data to determine certain general trends regarding how students view the GST examination. During the second stage, qualitative data were collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to interpret, elaborate, and contextualize the quantitative data. This design increases

validity by triangulation and enables qualitative findings to enrich inferences about statistical findings (Jason and Glenwick, 2016).

Data Collection Tools

The quantitative part of the study employed a self-constructed structured questionnaire to gather data (Akotia et al., 2023). The questionnaire comprised of 25 closed ended questions with a 5-point Likert scale that evaluated the perception, experience, level of stress and views of students about the GST examination system. The qualitative data collection tool was unstructured FGDs with open-ended questions, which were aimed at extracting detailed information about experiences and perspectives of students. FGDs were selected because of their ability to produce rich interactive data and reveal varying opinions and perspectives due to group dynamics (Billups, 2019). Before the final administration, a pilot test was carried out on the questionnaire using a small sample of students to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant.

Sampling

The research was carried out in the southern region of Bangladesh. The study respondents included first, second-, and third-year undergraduate students (sessions 2020–21, 2021–22, and 2022–23) who had appeared in or been admitted through the GST examination. During the quantitative stage, six universities were sampled purposely in terms of regional representation, feasibility, and institutional relevance: Khulna University (KU), Jashore University of Science and Technology (JUST), Gopalganj Science and Technology University (GSTU), University of Barishal (BU), Patuakhali Science and Technology University (PSTU), and Islamic University, Kushtia (IU). Within these institutions, student respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The calculated sample size was 368, with students of both genders included to ensure representativeness (Dhivyadeepa, 2015). During the qualitative stage, purposive sampling was used to identify the participants in order to obtain deep and meaningful experiences regarding the examination of the GST (Pathak, 2008). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were carried out in the six chosen universities with a total of 48 participants.

Research Procedures

Data collection began with the administration of the online survey. After the initial quantitative analysis, FGD participants were chosen by survey response to have a meaningful discussion (Poth, 2023). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation (Oliver, 2010). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive

statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data from FGDs were analyzed manually using a thematic narrative approach, allowing patterns and themes to emerge systematically from participants' accounts (Maxwell, 2013).

Validity and Reliability Measures

Several strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments and findings. The quantitative reliability was determined by the Cronbach alpha, which gave a value of 0.903 to the 25-item scale, which showed high internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). Triangulation was also used to enhance validity by integrating both survey and FGD data to support cross-method findings (Patton, 2014). The further validation of the content and construct validity was achieved via expert checking and pilot testing (Creswell, 2020). Pearson correlation coefficients were used to assess internal consistency validity, which revealed acceptable and positive correlations between items and total (Field, 2018). In the case of qualitative data, the member checking, expert review and thematic cross-validation were applied to increase the credibility and trust worthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Combining the qualitative and quantitative results further enhanced the methodological rigor of the study (Creswell and Clark, 2013).

Results

1. Perception of students about GST Examination

1.1 GST Exam has simplified the university admission process

Quantitative findings reveal a strong consensus that the GST Examination has simplified the university admission process. A majority of respondents agreed (49%, n=148) or strongly agreed (17%, n=51) with a mean score of 3.58, indicating general approval of the system (Fig. 2a). Qualitative findings also support this view with participants reporting that the GST exam was a good alternative to the old system of multiple-admission-tests. Students also emphasized the advantage of having access to various universities with one examination, saving on financial, traveling, and logistical strain. Despite the system being initially challenging to some, the overall feeling was positive, with some of the participants encouraging the introduction of GST to all Bangladesh-based universities with integrated category-based admission tests.

1.2 GST exam accurately measure a student's potential for success in higher education

Students expressed mixed views regarding the GST exam's ability to accurately measure academic potential. Quantitatively, 36% (n=109) agreed, while 30.7% (n=92) remained neutral, resulting in a moderate mean score of 3.19 (Fig. 2b). Qualitative results justify this ambivalence: although students liked the decreased load of exams and greater access to them, many of them questioned whether an entirely MCQ-based test could measure intellectual complexity, analytic and linguistic skill. The participants suggested some possible ways of improvement, including written elements, equal distribution of marks, and focus on English and ICT to provide a better evaluation of the higher education preparation.

1.3 GST Exam would make it easier for universities to evaluate applicants

Survey results indicate that most students believe the GST Examination facilitates easier evaluation of applicants for universities. Over half of the respondents (55.4%, n=163) agreed with this statement, with a mean score of 3.60, while only a minority disagreed (Fig. 2c). Though, qualitative data were not directly focused towards institutional evaluation efficiency, the participants highlighted standardized question format and fairness which alludes, indirectly, to better consistency and comparability between institutions on the applicant evaluation.

1.4 Worries and Fears during GST Preparation

Survey data show that exam-related anxiety is prevalent: 44.3% (n=126) agreed and 10.2% (n=29) strongly agreed that they experienced worries or fears during preparation, with a mean score of 3.40 (Fig. 2d). Qualitative data presents more emotional issues, such as a high level of stress, fear of failure, and the belief that with one test a student can define his/her academic future. Other stressors were the uncertainty associated with the entry of universities or their exit out of the GST system and the complexity of the migration process, indicating that the examination was of high stakes.

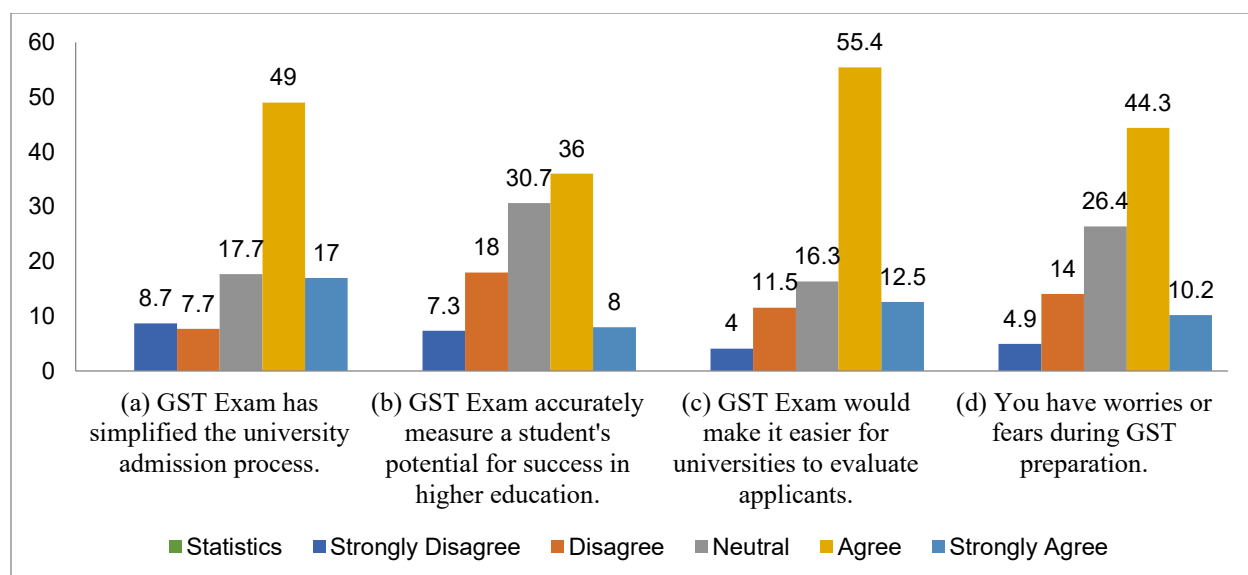


Fig. 2 Students' perception on admission processes, evaluation, and student concerns

1.5 GST exam was stressful

Quantitative findings suggest a mixed perception of stress. While 35.3% (n=100) agreed that the GST exam was stressful, the overall mean score of 3.00 indicates neutrality (Fig. 3a). However, qualitative data make the image more vivid, showing that there is great anxiety due to performance pressure, fear of poor grades, and lack of alternative opportunities. Students were also subjected to increased stress by sudden change of policy as in case of university withdrawal in GST.

1.6 GST Exam places too much pressure on students

Most respondents did not perceive the GST exam as placing excessive pressure on students. A combined 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed, with a mean score of 2.82 (Fig. 3b). The qualitative results partially agree with this perspective, with some students appreciating the collective admission system to eliminate the pressure of repeating exams. However, some others claimed psychological pressure under the influence of the decisive role of the exam, which means that students experience pressure differently.

1.7 Equal Opportunity in the GST System

Survey results show that most students perceive the GST exam as promoting equality, with 48.9% agreed and 15.2% strongly agreed (mean = 3.52) (Fig. 3c). However, qualitative findings reveal diverse opinions. Most welcomed

standardized testing and the availability of access, but others complained about bias in subjects, group benefits, and inequitable representations. Thus, although equality is broadly perceived, it is not universally accepted.

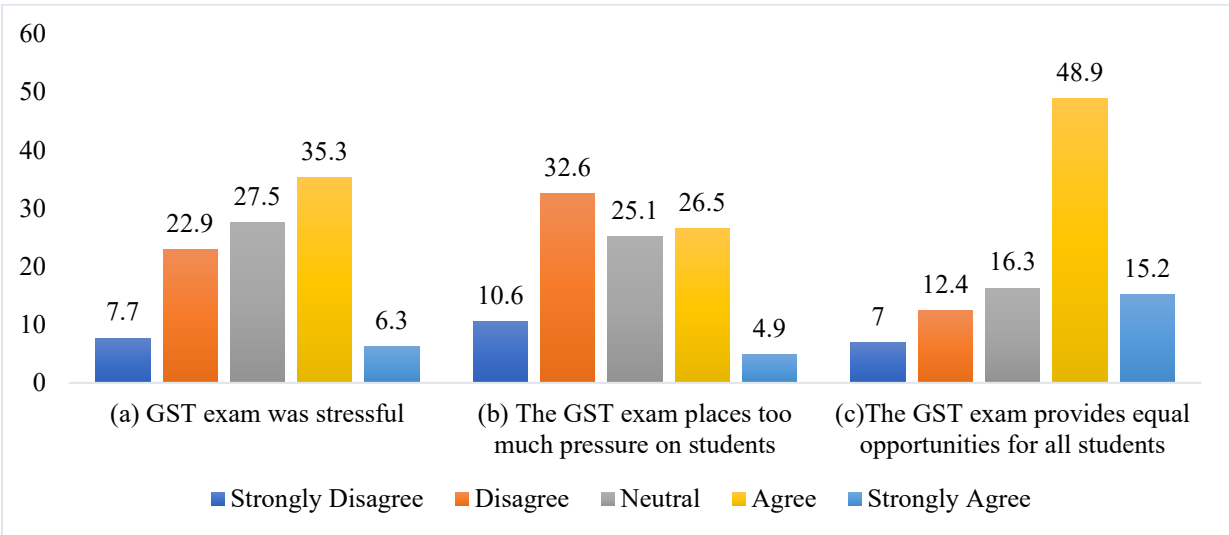


Fig. 3 Students' perception on stress, pressure, and equality of the GST exam

2. Students' satisfaction regarding GST exam

2.1 GST Exam should be accompanied by other criteria for admission

Nearly half of the respondents (45.4%) agreed that the GST exam should be complemented by other admission criteria, such as interviews or portfolios, while 27.8% remained neutral (mean = 3.52) (Fig. 4a). Qualitative results affirm this, as participants proposed viva voice examinations and holistic assessment techniques to enhance the ability of the students in exquisite competences other than test scores.

2.2 Satisfied with the overall process of the GST Exam

Quantitative data indicate moderate to positive satisfaction, with 42.9% (n=121) agreeing and 8.9% (n=25) strongly agreeing that they were satisfied (mean = 3.24) (Fig. 4b). Qualitative results indicate a general level of satisfaction of about 75 percent, which is due to less exam load, cost-effectiveness, availability of exam centers, standardized testing, and better opportunities of admission. Nevertheless, there are still complaints about inefficiency of administration, slowness of admission process, old merit lists, and technical problems.

2.3 Transparency of the GST Examination

Survey findings reveal that 58.8% of students agreed that the GST exam process is transparent, with a mean score of 3.46 (Fig. 4c). However, qualitative answers reveal that transparency is still an issue. Participants stressed that the system requires more effective communication, elaborate guidelines, open processing of results, and responsible administration to enhance the trust in the system.

2.4 Satisfaction with the system for entering university through the GST Examination

A substantial majority of respondents (63.6%) reported satisfaction with entering university through the GST system, reflected by a mean score of 3.60 (Fig. 4d). This finding is supported by qualitative data, which point to the flexibility of university choice and fairness. However, the participants mentioned that there could be improvement as they raised concerns regarding the complexity of migration and the role of institutions in their coordination.

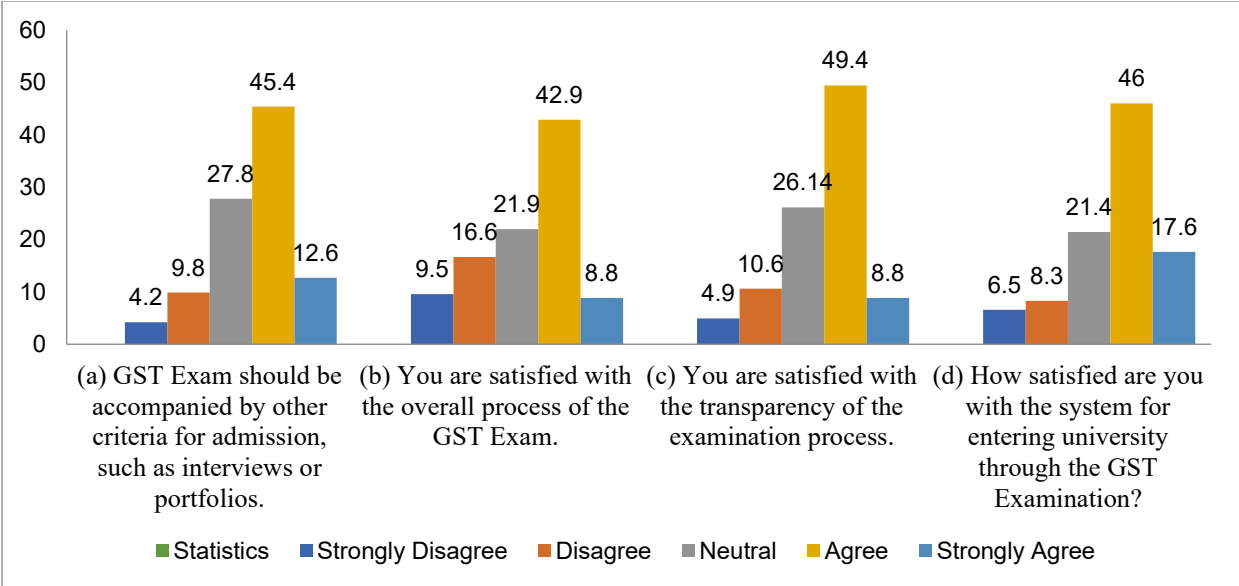


Fig. 4 Students' satisfaction regarding GST exam

3. GST Examination as a Beneficial Admission System

3.1 GST Exam is a fair way to evaluate a student's readiness for higher education

Survey results show that more than half of the students (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that the GST exam fairly evaluates readiness for higher education (mean = 3.33) (Fig. 5a). This perception is mostly true according to qualitative findings, which also indicate discrepancies in the form of inadequate focus on ICT and English proficiency, despite

their relevance in higher education. The idea of switching academic streams according to GST results was considered an opportunity and challenge.

3.2 GST exam provides a more holistic assessment of a student's abilities

Quantitative findings suggest moderate agreement that the GST exam provides a holistic assessment, with 42.8% agreeing and a mean score of 3.34 (Fig. 5b). Qualitative insights point to a variety of weaknesses such as unequal weight of the subjects, excessive use of MCQs and lack of testing analytical and language abilities. Respondents greatly promoted written elements, ICT inclusion, and university level standard of question to promote comprehensiveness.

3.3 GST Exam is a beneficial admission system for entering university

Overall, the GST Examination is perceived positively as a university admission system. A strong majority (68.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that it is beneficial, with the highest mean score (3.64) (Fig. 5c). Qualitative results support this evaluation with highlighting the decrease in exam load, equity, access, economic efficiency, and greater opportunities. Nevertheless, systemic issues of administration and procedure have raised concerns on the necessity of continuous reform to achieve the best use of the system.

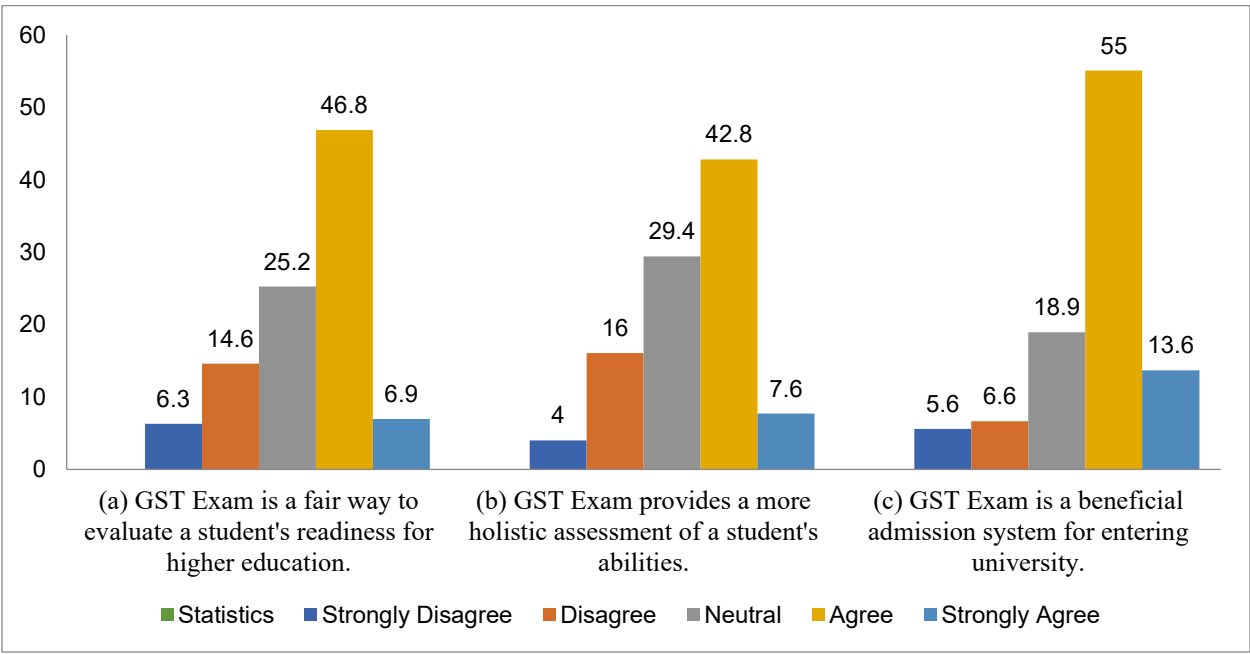


Fig. 5 Beneficial role of the GST Exam in university admissions

286

287 **4. Effectiveness of the GST Examination**

288 *4.1 GST Exam can reduce the stress associated with multiple university entrance exams*

289 Survey results show strong agreement that the GST examination reduces stress associated with sitting for multiple
290 university entrance tests. A clear majority of respondents agreed (55.4%, n=164) or strongly agreed (22.6%, n=67),
291 producing a relatively high mean score of 3.86. Only 10.7% of students expressed disagreement (Fig. 6a).

292 Qualitative answers also indicate the perceived benefits. Students stated that the use of one uniform test rather
293 than several university-focused ones helps to alleviate logistical and financial pressure. Nevertheless, even with these
294 benefits, qualitative results also indicate that stress is one of the prominent aspects of GST experience. A significant
295 number of respondents were worried that dependence on one exam exacerbates pressure because the results of one
296 exam can decide admission.

297 *4.2 GST Exam can potentially save students time and money compared to taking multiple exams*

298 Students overwhelmingly perceived the GST examination as a time- and cost-saving mechanism. Quantitatively,
299 43.4% (n=128) agreed and 32.5% (n=96) strongly agreed that GST saves time and money, resulting in a high mean
300 score of 3.92 (Fig. 6b).

301 This perception is highly supported by qualitative data. Respondents emphasized lower examination costs,
302 less travel, the presence of district-level exam centers and the removal of multiple application procedures. Being able
303 to apply to any university in the country with one exam score was considered especially beneficial.

304 *4.3 GST Exam can help reduce the pressure on students during the admission process*

305 In relation to admission pressure, quantitative data demonstrate generally positive perceptions. Approximately 47.4%
306 (n=139) of students agreed and 20.8% (n=61) strongly agreed that the GST exam helps reduce pressure during the
307 admission process, yielding a mean score of 3.68. Only a small minority strongly disagreed (4.1%) (Fig. 6c).

308 The qualitative results provide a subtle image. Students enjoyed the collective admission system that
309 minimizes the need to take a series of tests and enhances the scope of opportunities. On the other hand, several
310 respondents highlighted that the stakes which are attached to one test create anxiety especially because of the fear of

low performance and the lack of other avenues. The results of these studies show that GST alleviates some structural pressures and at the same time creates psychological pressure that is associated with uncertainty of outcomes.

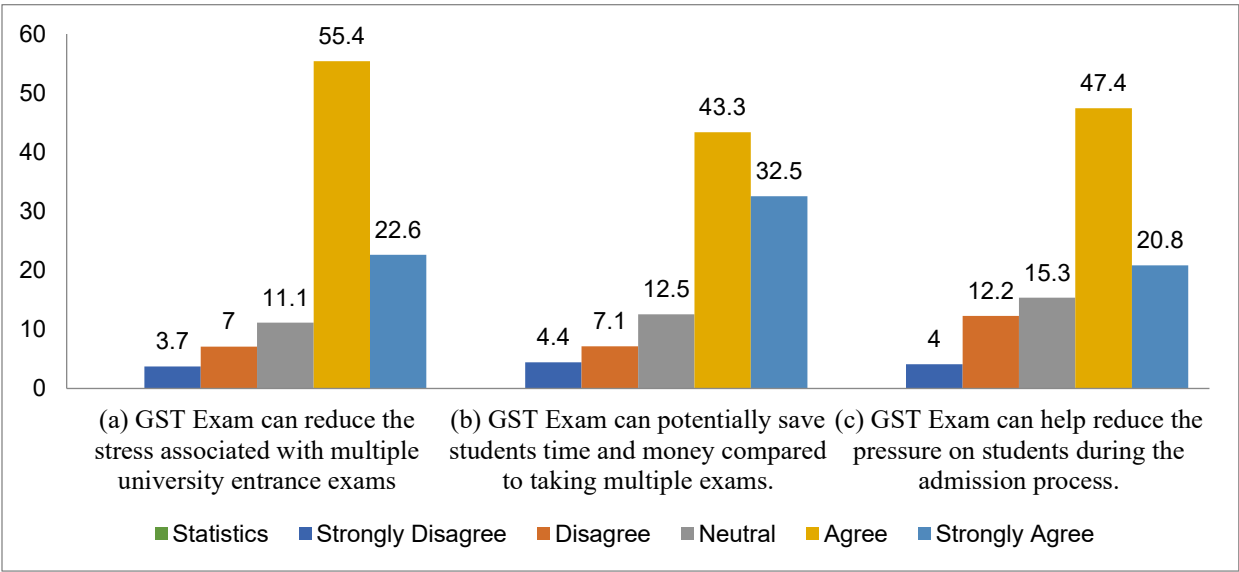


Fig. 6 Benefits of GST Exam in Knowledge Enhancement, Stress Reduction, and Efficient Admission Process

4.4 GST Exam can make it more convenient for students to apply to multiple universities

Quantitative findings indicate that GST significantly enhances convenience in applying to multiple universities. A large majority of students agreed (60.8%, n=178) or strongly agreed (15.0%, n=44), while only 6.1% disagreed. The mean score further confirms students' confidence in this aspect of the GST system (Fig. 7a).

According to qualitative data, students appreciate the centralized and collective GST examination. The possibility to select among various universities, standardized modes of assessment, greater number of seats and the lack of shift-based examinations were constantly cited as conveying signs of convenience.

4.5 GST Exam can help level the playing field for applicants from diverse backgrounds

Regarding equity and diversity, quantitative results indicate moderate support for the GST exam's role in leveling the playing field. Nearly half of the respondents (45.9%, n=133) agreed, while only 6.2% disagreed, resulting in a mean score of 3.55 (Fig. 7b).

However, qualitative results show divergent views. According to some participants, GST enables access to universities across regions, which encourages diversity. Others claimed that the admissions can still be locally focused

or subject-specific with limited diversity. Some respondents argued that although GST could be helpful in improving networking, it did not always boost inter-regional connectivity among students.

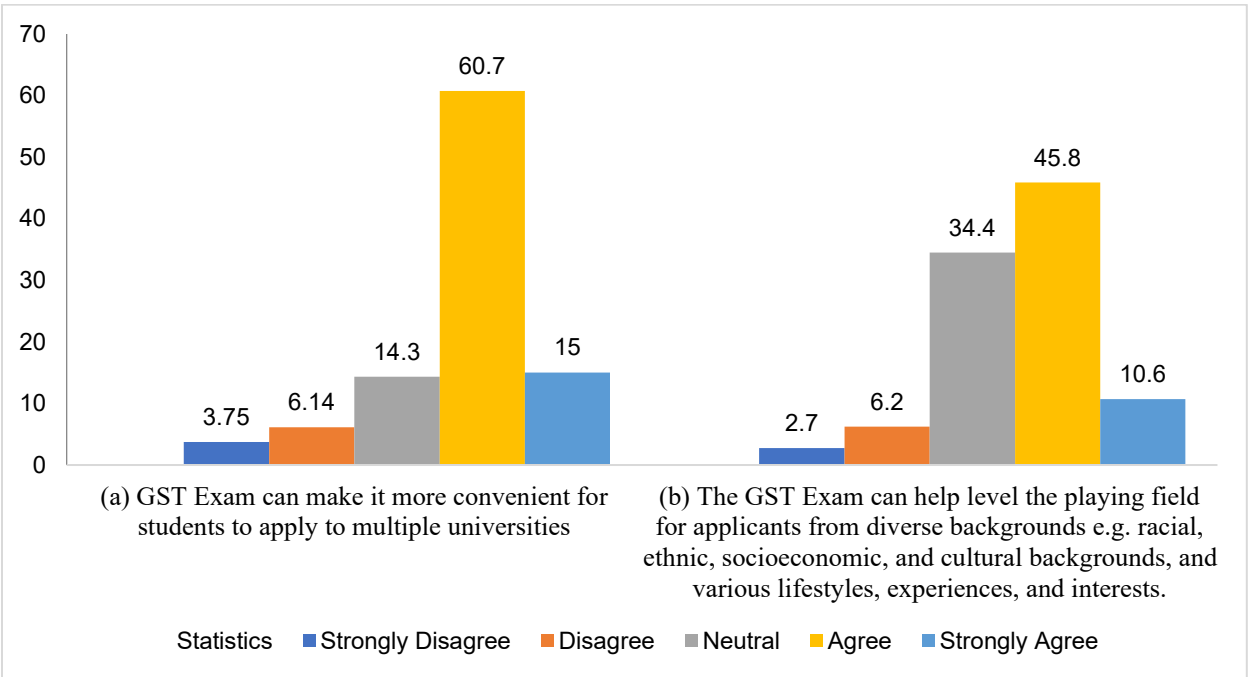


Fig. 7 Impact of GST Exam on Accessibility, Preparation, and Equality

4.6 GST Exam is an effective means of streamlining the university admission process

Quantitative data show cautious support for GST as a tool for streamlining admissions. Half of the respondents (50.7%, n=152) agreed and 9% (n=27) strongly agreed, while a notable proportion (27%) remained neutral. The mean score of 3.50 suggests moderate approval (Fig. 8a).

In qualitative responses, there are strengths and weaknesses. Students reported positive features like less pressure on exams, standard operating procedures, affordability and choice in university. They, however, also mentioned the issues of sluggish admission procedures, old-fashioned merit lists, migration issues, irregular admission timetables, and administrative wastefulness.

4.7 GST Exam is reducing the reliance on other admission criteria

Survey findings indicate that most students perceive GST as reducing reliance on other admission criteria. A majority agreed (54%, n=153) or strongly agreed (6%, n=17), producing a mean score of 3.51 (Fig. 8b).

This perception is justified by qualitative data, which represents GST as an all-inclusive and standardized assessment tool that has a more holistic evaluation of candidates compared to the use of traditional academic measures. Students focused on its national coverage and inclusivity, which implied that GST could serve as a key admission criterion, reducing the reliance of the institutions-specific or region-based ones.

4.8 GST exam is an effective admission test to university

Finally, quantitative results indicate general but not unanimous support for the effectiveness of GST as an admission test. Nearly half of the respondents (48%, n=136) agreed and 15.5% (n=44) strongly agreed, while 20.8% remained neutral. The mean score of 3.58 reflects overall positive perceptions (Fig. 8c).

Qualitative findings reveal a mixed yet generally favorable outlook. The students valued the efficiency, standardized and inclusive character of the GST exam, and its contribution to increasing access to higher education and encouraging participation in higher education. Meanwhile, administrative delays, technical inefficiencies, perceived bias, and low flexibility were reported of concern. Other participants added that GST enables students to move academic streams by performance to make better academic decisions. Overall, while students recognize GST as a promising and largely effective admission system, the findings underscore the need for continuous refinement to enhance fairness, efficiency, and student well-being.

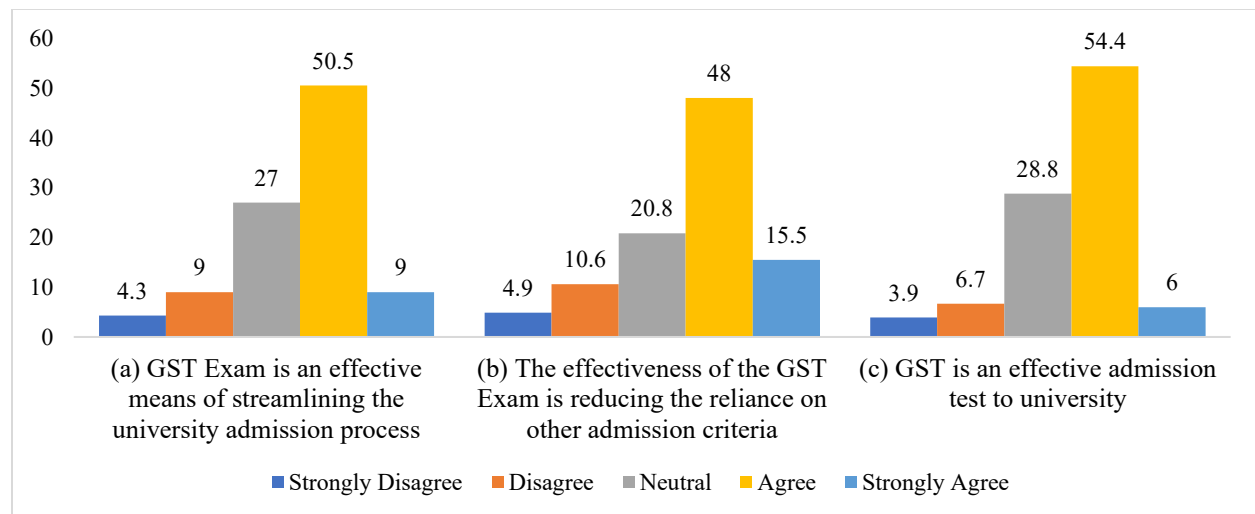


Fig. 8 The Impact and Efficacy of the GST Exam

Discussion

1. Perception of Students about the GST Examination

The perceptions of GST examination by students indicate a great support towards its structural simplification. Most of them stated that GST has simplified the admission process, made it less redundant, and allowed access to various universities with a single examination. This aligns with policy objectives articulated in the literature (Rahman et al., 2024; Billah, 2023) and supports global arguments favoring centralized admission systems for administrative efficiency (Cheng and Hamid, 2025). According to the assessment theory perspective (Gipps, 2011), it is evident that students are viewing GST as a policy that enhances institutional standardization and comparability in procedures.

Nevertheless, there arises ambivalence in the ability of the exam to indicate academic potential. Although a vast majority of students admitted that it was fair and standardized, a significant percentage of respondents doubted the sufficiency of an all-MCQ format in its ability to reflect the depth of analysis, language skills, and the ability to think critically. This criticism echoes with global literature that warns against reductive high-stakes tests that favor surface-level learning (Dong and Liu, 2022; Stobart and Eggen, 2012). Constructivist theory implies that learners do not only determine the effectiveness of assessment but also its perceived authenticity and relevance to meaningful learning (Harasim, 2017). The requirement of written parts and equal weighting in subjects is therefore a discussion of students need of epistemic legitimacy and not procedural fairness.

Moreover, the views on equality were quite favourable, yet not unanimous. Although students valued decreased monetary and logistical obstacles, qualitative results showed worries about bias in the subject and disproportionate institutional involvement. This is indicative of a larger academic argument: the centralization of systems can potentially minimize explicit forms of inequality and create forms of unequal structural benefits (Çirak, 2016). The results thus make unsophisticated assertions of meritocracy more difficult and add to the knowledge production by anticipating the differentiated experience of students in within a supposedly uniform system.

2. Students' Satisfaction Regarding the GST Exam

The overall levels of satisfaction were moderate to high especially in terms of lowered exam load, affordability and flexibility in choosing university. These results are consistent with expectancy-value theory (Raynor, 2021), since the satisfaction of the students seems to be strongly related to the value of perceived utility that saves time, money, and

effort, increases the level of acceptance of the system. Such practical advantages have a high motivational value in an environment where gaining entry into a public university is highly competitive.

However, satisfaction is conditional. Almost fifty percent of the respondents were in favor of supplementing the GST exam with some other requirements like interviews or holistic assessment. This finding carries the argument of reliability and validity of educational assessment (Levy-Feldman, 2025). Although a single standardized test is a way to achieve comparability, it might not be able to effectively represent a variety of competencies needed in different academic disciplines. Students' advocacy for supplementary criteria suggests an emerging demand for multidimensional assessment, challenging the dominance of single-score gatekeeping.

The issue of transparency has another paradox. The quantitative data showed that the overall confidence was in transparency, but the qualitative narratives showed the lack of confidence to communication, updates of merit lists, and migration processes. This tension stipulates one main point: perceived transparency is not merely procedural but communicative. As the theory of assessment stresses, institutional trust is not based on the fairness but on the visible accountability (Jones, 2018). Through elucidating this difference, the study fills a gap in previous GST research as most studies have concentrated on policy-design and not on the experience of legitimacy.

3. GST Examination as a Beneficial Admission System

Students overwhelmingly regarded GST as beneficial, particularly in reducing duplication and expanding access. This result supports the arguments that are reform-oriented that cluster systems democratize opportunity (Rahman et al., 2024). The ability to be applied nationally with one score was seen as groundbreaking, and particularly to the peripheral student population. In this regard, GST conforms to equity-based policy discussion in developing settings.

Nevertheless, the concept of benefit is understood pragmatically as opposed to pedagogically. Students have highly rated logistical efficiency and at the same time criticized constraints in holistic assessment and subject alignment. The perception that the exam permits academic stream mobility was to be both an opportunity and a risk-expanding mobility, but could also undermine disciplinary fit. It is an indication that Machado and Szerman (2021) have found that centralized exams could restructure academic pathways through unintended means.

Notably, the moderate level of agreement of students that GST offers a comprehensive evaluation presents a conceptual and knowledge gap between administrative integration and pedagogical comprehensiveness. Although the system consolidates institutions, it is not yet able to consolidate multiple epistemic standards. By defining this gap,

the study offers new knowledge on the difference between structural centralization and curricular validity, which is a neglected aspect of the research on admissions in Bangladesh.

4. Effectiveness of the GST Examination

The effectiveness, as understood by students, functions in three interconnected dimensions which are stress reduction, efficiency, and systemic streamline. The evidence of GST alleviating stress in case of numerous entrance exams is supported with strong quantitative evidence. It is consistent with the previous studies that have associated decentralized admission systems with psychological strain (Yatkin et al., 2023; Hossain and Halder, 2025). Through centralizing tests, GST seems to reduce logistical anxiety build-up.

However, qualitative results demonstrate a significant opposing point: stress is not abolished but focused. The single-exam model adds to the high stakes pressure where a test may make it or break it in academic destiny. This experience indicates what the assessment researchers call the risk compression wherein structural simplification increases the psychological stakes (Stobart and Eggen, 2012). The research therefore narrows down the current arguments by proving that centralized systems redistribute but not eliminate stress.

Regarding efficiency, students unanimously reported time and cost savings, which supports policy arguments of administrative rationalization. Perceived success in streamlining the admissions was however undermined by perceived slow processes, old merit lists and complexities in migration. These results indicate that effectiveness depends on the ability to govern and group inter-institutional coordination. According to Islam (2022), the lack of systemic coherence is caused by partial institutional participation. This structural criticism is empirically supported by the accounts of students.

Lastly, although most of them considered GST as a good admission test in general, significant levels of neutrality imply that some level of doubt remains. Such ambivalence is mirrored by the transitional nature of the reform; GST is very acceptable but not institutionalized in terms of trust, design perfection and participatory governance.

Recommendation

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it focuses the lived experiences of students in the discussion of admission reform, which addresses an empirical gap found in previous studies. Second, it goes further

than descriptive assessment and conceptual interpretation, differentiating between procedural efficiency and pedagogical validity, structural equity and experiential fairness. Third, it shows that the centralized admission reforms are complex sociotechnical systems: the success of this system is not only due to the logic of design but also psychological, communicative and governance processes.

Overall, the GST test is considered to be structurally advantageous, economically efficient, and mediocre. Nevertheless, its legitimacy over the long-term hinges on improving holistic assessment, improving the transparency, and eliminating the concentrated pressures that come with single high-stakes testing. Placing such findings in the context of the current theoretical and empirical discussion, the study would be useful in a wider discussion concerning the admission reform in developing higher education systems and the need to consider the student voice during the policy development.

Conclusion

This research explored the perception of the students, level of satisfaction, perceived benefits, and effectiveness of the GST examination system. On the whole, students believe that GST is a simplified, affordable, and relatively equitable system of admission which minimizes duplication and increases access. The results show moderate or high levels of satisfaction with regard to convenience and financial efficiency. Nevertheless, there are still doubts about the completeness of assessment, psychological stress, disclosure, and organizational coordination. Although GST is an effective measure to combat structural inefficiencies of the decentralized model, it places high-stakes pressure in a single examination and brings concerns over validity and holistic assessment. Addressing the research questions, the study finds that students have generally positive attitudes towards GST and view it as helpful and moderately effective but not without constraints. Sustainability and legitimacy of the system will also be pegged on continuous reform, especially, the inclusion of wider assessment criteria, enhanced governance, and enhanced transparency. This study anticipates the student views and offers evidence-based information to inform the formulation of future admission policies in Bangladesh.

Acknowledgements

The respondents of this study have been credited by the authors as being helpful in the successful completion of this study.

465 **Funding**

466 No funding was received for this research.

467 **Ethics declarations**

468 This study followed the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association [WMA], 2013)
469 and its later amendments. There was no existing ethics committee or Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the
470 researchers' institution at the time of the study. As a result, this study did not receive formal institutional ethical
471 approval. However, all necessary ethical practices were followed during the study. Participation was voluntary, and
472 participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Informed consent was obtained before data
473 collection. Participants could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Their
474 privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality were protected, and the collected data were handled securely.

475 **Informed consent**

476 Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participants were informed
477 about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and the use of the collected information for academic
478 research and publication. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

479 **Competing Interests**

480 The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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