

Can the burden of coaching be taken off our shoulders?

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I gaped at my discovery lying on my study table. I have succeeded in removing the external zinc casing of the dry cell using a nail cutter. The pitch black carbon powder left stains on my fingers as I matched the internal contents of the dry cell with the diagram on the textbook. They matched astoundingly. I wondered whether I should indulge myself in a brief experiment on the non-functioning optical mouse that I have saved for a week. But a mere glance at the watch was sufficient to stop me. It was 2:00 am. I would have to wake up at 6:00 am in the morning and attend school till 2:00 pm. From there, I would have to run to biology coaching class and attend a physics mock test that will end at 8:00 pm. The thought of tomorrow's hectic schedule dissipated any thirst for knowledge and made me succumb to the warmth of bed.

Yes, we - the students of this decade- are accustomed to whirl around this vortex of coaching centers. The time and the energy we lose running to private tutors makes us exhausted, dwindling the innate interest that blooms

within us at the sight of a new chapter or the introduction of a new concept. Consequently, instead of perceiving education as an opportunity or an arena to enjoy ourselves, we perceive it as a burden or a challenge. This mentality is further fostered by the modus operandi incorporated into the coaching centers. Since the tutors' chief objective is to enhance our academic scores, they are likely to adopt shortcuts aimed at making the text easier while enabling us to score higher. This is achieved by the provision of shortened notes, the rigorous practice of past question papers and end of semester mock tests. Thus, it is often seen that instead of having a full working knowledge of the chapters, our brains are clogged with some abstract highlighted notes and formulas. We fail to accomplish the main purpose of education - attaining knowledge. It can be easily inferred that we will lag behind in the occupational field in future with such a dysfunctional system. Then why are the students, parents and teachers still associated with this industry of private tuition?

Because of the aforementioned result - oriented modus operandi adopted by the system, students going to coaching centers are seen to pass with better results than those who do not. Ergo, parents are encapsulated as they prioritize the attainment of the best GPAs to ensure a seat in a top-notch university so that their children can stand tall in the competitive job market. Students, enticed by the scope of achieving better scores with minimum effort, capitulate to the system. The reasons school teachers also teach at coaching centers are twofold. Firstly, the shorter duration of the classes in school acts as a constraint on how well they can explain the text in class, answer questions and clarify confusions. The longer duration of classes in the coaching centers often avails the opportunity to use visual aids (for example a video shown using a projector) or conduct mini experiments to demonstrate the practical implementations of the content of the text to improve students' interests. Secondly, the Bangladeshi teachers are not sufficiently financially motivated by the official education system. As a result they have to resort to private tuition as a source of non-taxable income to support their families.

The education ministry had repeatedly discussed the industry of private tuition and pledged to take active steps to combat it. A draft of a law had been prepared in 2013 according to which any kind of professional

teaching outside the classroom is punishable. However, it was reported that the draft included a section apparently legalizing coaching and private tuition as 'shadow education'. It mentioned that the government will design a specific policy to control and supervise this shadow education system. Most recently, the education minister told reporters that textbooks will be simplified so that students can comprehend them easily.

Indeed, it is true that this shadow education system cannot be abolished as a whole. But 'monitoring' such a system would be impractical as it would be impossible to keep track of the thousands of such coaching centers proliferating in every street and household. On the other hand, 'simplifying the textbooks' would not achieve much of the purpose as students do not go to coaching centers only because they lack the ability to 'understand' their texts. According to some research, students remember 10% of what they read and 50% of what they see and hear. Therefore, a student relying only on the book will remember 10% of the text while a student having a private tutor to elaborately explain the content of the text with some visual will have the possibility of remembering as high as 50% of his text. Hence, the only way to loosen the obsession of students on coaching and drive them towards the school curriculum would be to employ a modified advanced system of learning inside the school classrooms.

First and foremost, the number of school hours should be increased. School hours should be extended from 5-6 hours to 9 hours per day. In this way, teachers would get sufficient time to extensively explain the content of the text while making students practice past question papers to boost their GPA to cater for the needs of the increasingly competitive job market. Moreover, the extended time will allow teachers to incorporate visual aids with mini text-oriented experiments and activities in their teaching methods that will serve the purpose of elevating students' interests. Extended school hours will not over-exhaust students. Instead, it would save their energy for homework because instead of attending 6 hours of school and 4 hours of coaching with 1 hour lost travelling to and fro coaching, they would attend a solid 9 hours of school, saving 2 hours time. The feasibility of extended school hours is exemplified by China where students attend school from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm.

Secondly, constructive steps should be taken to motivate the teachers to work harder as they would be the ones

to deliver the additional materials they usually avail at coaching centers in the extended hours. The chief method of motivation will have to be monetary as teachers will have the tendency to tutor privately if they cannot equate their school salaries with the requirements of their family in the rising economy. Then again, raising the average salary of teachers would depend on the accounts departments of the respective schools whose hands are tied by the revenue obtained from school fees. At the end of the day, the school fees would have to be increased to make the additional effort by teachers possible. When first heard, the idea might seem to exacerbate the problem. But, if we delve into the profundity of the matter it becomes lucid that it is indeed achievable. Parents are already making surplus expenditure in the education of their children by paying for private tuition. If that amount could be navigated into the school fees for the extended hours, everyone could have benefited from the system. Private tutors not teaching in schools will not be adversely affected as they can easily acquire jobs in schools which will be requiring extra staff to support the extended hours. Another method that can be employed to motivate the teachers to work harder is to extend the National Professor Award to a 'Best Teacher Award' that would be given to 64 best teachers of 64 districts annually. The criterion for the award will be the frequency of the use of videos and text - oriented experiments and activities by the teacher, which will be recorded by the school headmaster through a register.

The steps that should be taken to implement the aforementioned system are i) passing a legislation to permit extended school hours with a specified increase in school fees ii) passing a legislation to obligate the school authority to fire a teacher found guilty of teaching privately and iii) issuing the Best Teacher Award with proper inspection before nomination. The absence of one of these steps would make the overall system collapse. Therefore, it is necessary that all these steps are taken simultaneously to ensure its efficiency.

The collection of steps I proposed is not at all perfect. In fact, none are as every proposed idea will have some flaws. But we will have to deal with the drawbacks of a new system and modify it from time to time to make the system successful. But first we must venture to take a few significant steps. I am looking forward towards the day when each of us will have a nail cutter to open a dry cell while studying it at school! ■