



PRIVATE VS SCHOOLS

The O/A Level conundrum

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O/A Levels is a crucial time for those of you pursuing the British curriculum in your schools.

In fact, these four years might be more important than any before it, as your final grades in these exams will be the ones most people will look to when judging the state of your school work.

Or so we assume.

The problem with making such an assumption as mentioned previously is that not all institutions you apply to in the future will use the same criteria to judge you, even if we narrow it down to what they're looking for in your school work.

This leads us into the issue of the somewhat notorious private O/A Level system that exists in our country. I say "notorious" because some parents have this preconceived notion, which is pretty inaccurate, that studying in this private system means their child has for sure given up on education and is now pursuing some form of dark arts as their future career.

Those of you contemplating whether to leave your schools and join the private system are either completing eighth grade and preparing for their O Levels or finishing your O Levels from school and considering the idea of doing A Levels under a private organisation.

Pro tip: Leaving school after completing the ninth grade wholly defeats the purpose of shifting to private in most scenarios.

Therefore I'd like to shed some light on the private vs school debate, and hopefully help some of you in making your own decisions.

COACHING CENTRES

Whether you're in private, schools, or any system of education in our country for that matter, coaching classes are vital to the education "ecosystem" here. Coaching centres bridge the gap between having a decent preparation, and an extremely well-synchronised preparation if you enrol in a good one.

Now, for someone in school, you're bound to go to coaching classes, with the latest joining period being at the start of the tenth grade for your O Levels. You'll be in coaching classes for both years of your A Levels as the two stages of AS and A2 have a combined syllabus. Therefore, as students of a school, you'll most likely end up spending your mornings in school and your evenings in coaching centres. And you really don't have any other option. Schools rarely offer the same rigorous process of syllabus completion and mock tests that coaching centres have to offer. As a private student, however, you have an adequate

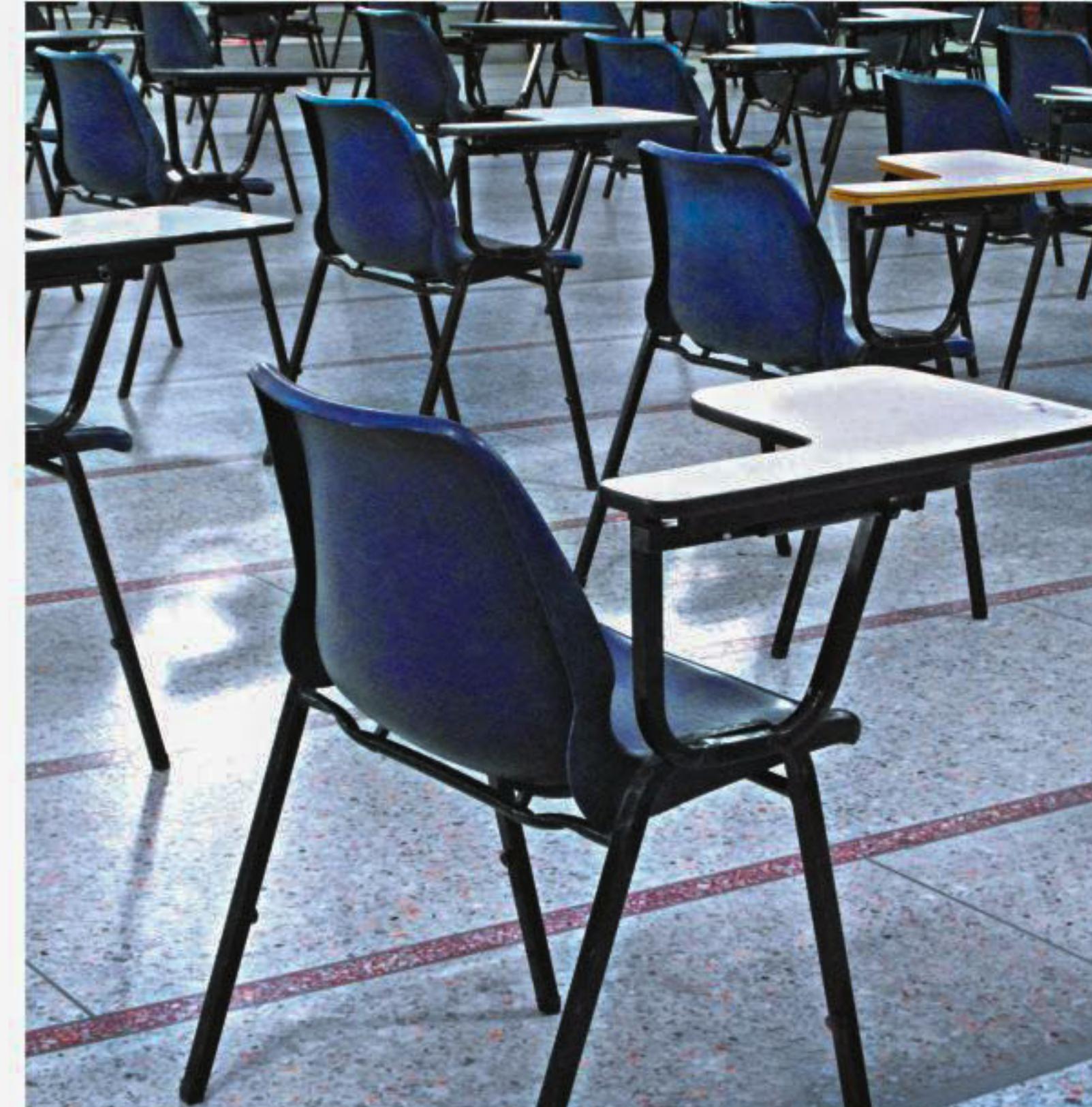
amount of time to spare on either getting the required amount of sleep or on some extracurricular activities.

In this category, the private system can definitely edge out a win over schools.

THE FINANCES

Continuing directly from our point on coaching centres, let's talk about the costs.

It's easy to forget just how expensive English medium schooling can be. The range of tuition fees can be anything between BDT 8,000 and 20,000 per month. Now, if we take the average figure of this range, it comes to around BDT 14,000 per month. For O Levels, the usual trend is to enrol in coaching classes for every subject save English Language. So, for the sake of being generous, if we estimate



that as being six different coaching classes, with the average monthly fee of being BDT 5,000, that's around BDT 30,000 a month. Add that to the pre-existing school fee of BDT 14,000 and you've got a hefty bill of BDT 44,000 every month.

That's close to what I pay for a semester of university now. And that's not exactly where the costs end. You also have to dish out extra when registering for your O/A Level examinations. Even though that's a one-time fee, it's still disappointing to see that schools, mostly the ones that charge exorbitant tuition fees, hand you the registration form without having some prior arrangement which would at least save you the cost of exam registration.

Now, for students studying in the private system, the costs of school tuitions are immediately eliminated. Some of you may say that schools are worth the extra money, and schools have their own system of merit, but looking at it strictly from a financial perspective, the private system takes the win in this category as well.

UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

Probably the most dreaded two-word combination that O/A Level students fear, but it is inevitable.

For those applying to local universities, having a school name on their certificate definitely makes one more desirable than someone else from a private background with the same grades.

Now, for those of you who wish to apply abroad, let's get into the thick of it. Most, if not all, universities abroad require you to submit your certificates through your school. In almost all cases, your school administrator will have to attest and send the documents via their own correspondence.

There is also the situation with schools based in the United States which do not recognise O/A Levels, and instead require transcripts of your secondary and high school which can only be made by a legitimate school. Students from a private background can resort to using the British Council to send its documents, but it becomes increasingly hard to explain to some universities why you do not have the required school certificates, as they have no understanding of this private system that we have.

School goers can finally rejoice, for now, you get to brag over your private counterparts about what that extra money was worth. This round goes to staying in school, kids.

As we have already analysed, both systems have their own merits and drawbacks. And which points you wish to assign most weight to is subjective. Some of you might care more about saving money, while others might want to go all in for the dream of an Ivy League degree. What you choose is really up to you.

There are a bunch of other points that can also be considered, like the discipline you gain from staying in a school curriculum, as well as how relatively easier it is to make friends in school than if you're a private student.

So take this information with a grain of salt, because I've seen my share of extraordinary students as well. Some who went to their dream university abroad even though they studied in a private system. And others who never joined coaching classes, and still got eight A*'s, saving their parents a big chunk of the costs as well.

Aaqib is stuck in an existential crisis loop. Send help at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com