

We don't want coaching classes yet we can't do without them

INQIAD BIN ALI

The rise of coaching centres has been a hotly-debated topic in education for a long time. Charging big fees and coercing students into buying guide books, they have only widened the education inequality.

Despite it all, in certain cases, coaching is essential for better learning. Given the current quality of education, a lion's share of students needs extra guidance to understand complex topics.

One of the major complaints in our classrooms is the shortage of time. Each period typically lasts 40 minutes. For teachers, it's difficult to properly deliver the lessons in such short time frames.

Unfortunately, adding more time to classes is a seemingly impossible task for schools, even when many conduct classes in two shifts. Faced with shortage of time and classrooms in schools, many students enrol in after-school coaching classes that typically last longer. This duration allows teachers to delve deeper into the concepts and allows room for classes to get interactive.

I have realised that classrooms are often chaotically monotonous affairs. The reasons are clear – the average teacher to student ratio in Bangladesh was 1:40 in 2020. Operating such large classes on their own gets naturally tough for teachers, when according to UNICEF, the standard ratio in classrooms should be 1:20.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

In comparison, coaching classes have it better. Having smaller classes make teaching and learning more streamlined; teachers can easily repeat their lessons if anyone fails to grasp it. They can figure out a particular student's strengths or weaknesses, and work on them in a methodical way.

For reasons including, but not limited to, time allotment and teacher-student ratio, many teachers are more enthusi-

astic in their private tuition classes than in classrooms at school. Many even use classrooms as recruiting sessions, displaying just enough to woo students to their coaching classes. While that sounds unfair and morally wrong, people often fail to look at it from the teacher's perspective.

As sad as it sounds, teaching in Bangladesh is a heartlessly tough and low-paying career. Many don't have their Monthly Pay Orders (MPOs), so pay is uncertain.

Nationally, our budget allocation for education is quite low, with the latest one being a paltry 1.83 percent of GDP, against the recommended 6 percent mark by UNESCO.

While increased education spending is not the silver bullet, it could go a long way to ensure teachers get decent salaries. Consequently, their dependence on coachings to feed their families would diminish. They might well put more effort into teaching within the classrooms. It might negate the need for coachings altogether, unless absolutely necessary for those willing. Even then, it should be done within school compounds, in school approved fees, so that students of all backgrounds can easily afford it.

References

1. New Age Bangladesh. July 2022. Provisions for coaching, tuition by teachers criticised.
2. The Daily Star. June 2022. Education budget only 1.83% of GDP.
3. UNICEF. April 2019. *A World ready to learn: prioritizing quality early childhood education.*
4. The Daily Star. April 2022. *Invest in education to reduce inequality.*
5. The Daily Star. June 2022. *Can a new education law solve our problems?*

Inqiad is a long suffering Manchester United fan and a self-proclaimed Targaryen. Contact him at inqiadali007@gmail.com

Living with Vitiligo

HASIB UR RASHID IFTI

One white spot, that's how it started.

Around 8:30 PM on a September night, I noticed a small round white spot on my feet, staring back at me as I kept examining it. After I told my father about it, he simply laughed my suspicions off. My mother kept insisting that I should consult a doctor. Two more spots within a few weeks, we went to a doctor who confirmed that the biggest nightmare for my family had come true – I had vitiligo.

I had seen vitiligo patients in the past. As a child, I'd stare at them and ask my mother about their condition. No matter how curious my childish gazes might've been, I later realised how uncomfortable I made them feel. Years later, when my neighbouring kids would stare at my foot covered in vitiligo spots and ask, "Why is your foot like this?" I'd smile it off hastily and try to come up with a quirky answer to make them laugh.

The initial few months were filled with panic. I'd look at my distressed parents trying to find a cure. While part of me tried to be strong, another part couldn't help but think it was karma getting back at me for my past sins. My desperate father tried everything: homoeopathy, allopathy, and Ayurveda. I was even taken to a local kobiraj who told me not to include milk or eggs in my diet because it being white would trigger the disease. I worked through all these lunacies for I'd see my father, who's always been the strongest personality in my life, become vulnerable and prepared to take any measure to "save" his son.

I mention "save" because later on, I realised that I didn't need saving. I needed acceptance. I needed the people around me to accept my condition as a part of me. Every time my father would come to my room to chat, he'd listen to my stories while staring at my feet, examining them for any improvements. I

knew he meant well but maybe I needed him to do the exact opposite – to stop ogling them or examine them. Maybe all I needed was for the people around me to continue being how they were before my melanocytes went dysfunctional.

Back then, someone told me, "It's just something you have. It's like how I have curly hair. It's just a feature." That small gesture of kindness meant the world to me. I learned how to live with the questions, with the raised eyebrows and the stares. I learned to laugh when my friends called me a zebra. I learned to accept it when my parents decided to hide my condition from my relatives. And I learned to wear socks, everywhere.

Except for the beach. Years later, I've now learned how to walk barefoot on the beach while the entirety of Kolatoli stares at my legs. While the entire time I was expecting the world to accept me, I should've been the one accepting myself

in the first place.

Remind Ifti to be quieter at hasiburrashidifti@gmail.com

