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■ CAREER ■

Things to consider before you

START TUTORING

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BIPRA PRASUN DAS

After completing my A levels, the prospect of making some money from something I enjoyed, teaching, lured me into tutoring. I was excited to start teaching young people, solve their problems, and have a real impact on my tutees' academic lives. However, my excitement was short-lived as I was faced with difficulties I had not previously encountered.

For many Bangladeshi students, home tutoring is often the only way to earn money. While the idea of being a home tutor may feel like a fulfilling part-time gig that rakes in the dough, the reality can be quite different. There are risks of being exploited, the burden of time and stress management, and the feelings of being undervalued, underpaid, and underappreciated can prevail.

Some tutoring arrangements entail tutors working long hours without breaks while being paid significantly less than the value of their services. This is often the case for students who desperately seek tutoring opportunities to finance their university tuition fees or to shoulder family responsibilities due to unforeseen circumstances.

Souhardya Dev, an undergraduate student at North South University, has been teaching for a couple of years now. He remarked, "While I understand the guardians' concerns for their child's academic performance, they often expect tutors like me to provide academic support

throughout the week, attempt to schedule extra lessons, and express dissatisfaction with the number of hours I am teaching, even though it was previously agreed upon. This is very overwhelming." Abritti Mondal, also an undergraduate student at North South University who has been tutoring for over a year now, added, "Often the tutee and their guardians have little respect for our time. The lack of punctuality from the student's end causes undue stress and makes it harder to manage an already busy schedule."

On top of this, tutors often encounter delays in receiving payment. In more unfortunate scenarios, student tutors report being paid less than what was agreed upon. Saptodipa Shaswate, a recent A level graduate who has been teaching for more than a year, shared her experience, "A few months ago, the parent of my now-former tutee offered me much less money than my agreed-upon tuition fees near the end of the month and informed me that my services were no longer required. When I insisted on being paid the appropriate amount, I was told that I had missed lessons, whereas I had actually missed only one lesson that month. I was then asked to leave."

Such experiences are not rare. Student tutors are especially vulnerable to being financially exploited as in most cases, tutoring arrangements are based on verbal agreements with no formal contracts. Tuition media, which act as intermediaries between clients and tutors, are often excessively exploitative. They provide no room for negotiation and charge way more than is reasonable. These intermediaries also often choose to conveniently leave out important information about the arrangement.

The act of teaching can often come with the sense that your efforts are not being reciprocated by your tutee. When I was just getting started with tutoring, it was a real challenge to get one of my mentees to put in any effort from their end due to their complete nonchalance towards their studies. When they fared poorly in the final exams, I was reprimanded by their mother. She held me entirely responsible for the bad result, even though I had previously expressed my concerns about her child's academic performance to her on multiple occasions.

Many tutors can report similar experiences. Abritti remarked, "As a home tutor, you are held completely responsible for your tutee's grades. I think this is unfair to some extent, as effort from the student's end is also equally important for good grades." Souhardya added to Abritti's comments, saying, "It is frustrating when the student is not willing to put in the effort by doing their homework, which often results in lower-than-expected grades."

Despite everything, tutoring remains a deeply gratifying experience for many. Reflecting on her positive experiences as a tutor, Abritti said, "When my tutees express their newfound comprehension of an academic concept that they previously found challenging, and when they share that they're achieving better grades at school because of my assistance, it fills me with joy. It's rewarding to know that my sincere efforts have yielded positive results."

However, the problems that most tutors face so often are very real, and are impossible to overcome without the collective efforts of all parties involved. It is important that tutors fulfil the duties they are paid to do, whilst not compromising their physical, mental and emotional well-being, and knowing where to draw the line. On the flip side, guardians and tutees need to understand that student-tutors have responsibilities outside of the tutoring arrangement, and do not owe them services beyond what they are paid to provide.

Before starting tutoring, it is important you assert boundaries, negotiate fair terms, and make your expectations known. You can do this by clearly communicating your availability, preferred working hours, payment rates, frequency of sessions, and limitations right from the get-go. Advocate for yourself and seek agreements that reflect the value of your services. Doing so can help prevent overwork and ensure that you are compensated fairly for your time.

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