

■ CAREER ■

The trials and tribulations of TUTORING AS A STUDENT

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Tutoring has long been a lucrative way to earn money on the side for students in Bangladesh, considering that part-time jobs are not widely available or even feasible for some. Tutoring students generally involves shorter and more flexible hours compared to a part-time job and doesn't usually require any specific qualification or specialised skill, save for rehashing previous syllabi. Despite the many conveniences that it offers, taking on tuition gigs comes with its own set of problems.

Unless availed through an agency, tutoring opportunities are offered and taken on with no official procedures, which leaves room for the tutors to be financially exploited. A verbal, off-the-paper agreement means that there is no recourse for them to resort to either if they need it. So, it's usually a good idea to ensure that the other party is reliable before starting the job.

Ashfaqur Rahman, a student of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (EEE) at Islamic University of Technology (IUT), who's been tutoring since the first year of university, shares that he's had several experiences of being financially exploited. He said, "I got underpaid a lot when I tutored students. Once, an arrangement for Tk 5,000 a month was set up with a student's family, but later they cited a family emergency and paid me two thousand for the first month. This continued for the next few months as well. I didn't continue after that. There was another instance at a different gig where they didn't pay me an entire month's salary even though I took classes on a regular basis."

Another common scenario tutors often face is irregularity or delay when it comes to monthly payments. Most student tutors rely on salaries from tuition gigs for their daily expenditures. As a result, their budgets are stretched thin until they receive the next payment. There are also some tutors who agree to receive payment once a certain number of tutoring sessions have been completed, which tends to be 12 a month.

Being a female student and taking on tuition gigs can pose another set of problems. Tanjim believes that her experiences of being coerced to comply with unreasonable demands were partially attributed to her being a woman.

Mehjabeen Rahman, a student of International Relations at Dhaka University (DU), recalls her bitter experiences of tutoring. "In my five years as a tutor, every year I've had a case where I didn't get paid even after completing the agreed number of classes for the month. I always sort out my payment and the number of classes I'm going to take before I start to avoid any confusion. Even then, a lot of the parents want me to conduct more sessions than initially agreed upon, but without the extra reimbursement," she remarked.

Beyond financial exploitation, many student tutors have also had to face mistreatment when dealing with parents. Tanjim Tasnim, also a student at Dhaka University studying International Relations, shares her struggles, "I found a gig through a tuition media where I came across a guardian who was very insistent that I keep the whole salary to myself and not pay the media their share of the fee. She offered to call them and tell

about the remuneration. After I stated my expectations, he told me to visit their home to discuss it further. On the first two days that I visited their place, based on the instructions that he had given me, he wasn't home. Later, he told me to visit on a weekend but he still wasn't there when I visited. Later on, I told him that I couldn't continue taking classes unless the matter of salary was fixed. I told him my expected salary before I



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them that she didn't hire me, so I could keep the whole sum. Despite my efforts, she went ahead and did it anyway. I felt pressured to accept this situation."

Students who take on tuition offers sometimes observe that their time is regarded with little importance, as evident through frequent cancellations and rescheduling. Juggling one or more tuitions on top of regular academic and co-curricular activities is far from a piece of cake. It requires careful scheduling to synchronise. Cancelling classes on short notice or requesting frequent reschedules can pose significant problems for the tutors and their routines.

Tanjim recalled, "I tutored a student who studied in fourth grade. As he was just a child, I used to be in communication with his mother. There were multiple times when I went to their place and was told that the student had been sleeping and wouldn't be studying for the day. This happened even during Ramadan when I had to travel on foot in the scorching heat. I mentioned more than once that I should be notified thirty minutes ahead of time for cancellations, but it was futile. I needed the money, so I had no choice but to tolerate this behaviour."

Laheen Mashahad, a final-year student at the Islamic University of Technology, had to put up with a similar cavalier attitude. "The student's uncle contacted me

started, but he proceeded to offer me less than half of my request, rendering it impossible for me to continue teaching," he lamented.

Being a female student and taking on tuition gigs can pose another set of problems. Tanjim believes that her experiences of being coerced to comply with unreasonable demands were partially attributed to her being a woman. She recounted an instance where a male guardian was angered because she had rejected his offer to tutor his daughter. In addition, Mehjabeen mentioned that she often receives tuition offers that involve taking classes after dark, which she has to turn down for the sake of her own safety and comfort.

Considering the job climate of Bangladesh, tuition remains the most convenient way for a student to earn, despite all the drawbacks. If you're a student looking to undertake this venture, it's best to remain vigilant and carefully evaluate the environment you'll be working in. Finding tuition through mutual connections is the best way to go, but if you're unable to do that, it's essential to make sure the tuition media is reliable. Your expectations regarding salaries should also be settled before you start teaching. Through exercising a little caution and proper communication, you can, to the best of your abilities, ensure that your tuition journey isn't full of hurdles.