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The tuition culture

By Bilqees I. Patel



Tuition centres have a high prominence in present Pakistani society. Every next student, whether gifted or average, rich or poor, is taking tuitions, which has made this culture take root in the present educational system.

The scenario is completely reversed from the past when availing tuitions meant that you were a weak or bad student. Tuitions today are a significant need of every student. Thus you see small groups of students gathered at teachers' homes or well-furnished coaching centres just about everywhere. The fees too varies according to vicinities, further adding to parents' burdens. However, if one would like to evaluate the causes of this scenario, there may be plenty of them.

The biggest cause of the increasing demand for tuitions is the large number of pupils in school classrooms. Each class is full of varied talents with areas in need of improvement. The ratio of teacher to student is usually 1:50 and they have short periods (around 30-45 minutes) to teach, which makes it difficult for the teachers to pay individual attention especially to the class's average or slow learners. A teacher may find it difficult to identify each student's need in order to help him cope with his studies. That is why a student is compelled to undertake tuitions in order to successfully complete the examination requirement.

The present teachers' status in society and lesser monetary benefits in the teaching profession also contribute to an increased demand for tuitions. Many teachers who run private tuition centres on the side see to it that their students attend those instead of benefitting from what is taught in the classroom. It is the tuition centres where they teach what was to be taught in the classroom with complete determination and sincerity.

Another important thing leading to the tuition culture is the present examination system in Pakistan. The students are expected to develop knowledge-level understanding of their subject rather than indulge in the self-investigation of different phenomenon which leads them into the trap of rote learning and solving hundreds of old examination papers before sitting for an exam.

Tuition centres encourage students to take shortcuts. Rather than studying the respective subjects in depth, they provide them with old examination papers to solve in a given time period and just like that studying becomes the training of the mind to work mechanically rather than think objectively.

The parents' education level or the time they can give to their children also contributes to the demand for tuitions. Research has proved that the parents' level of education has a high positive relation with students' educational achievement (Hodgkinson, 2004).

Even today in Pakistan many of the parents, especially mothers who are considered responsible for the child's education, are illiterate. This enhances the need of arranging tuitions for children in order to provide them with an opportunity to improve their educational outcome. In addition, the concept of both working parents has led to parents spending half or sometimes even a whole day outside the house. This makes it difficult for them to pay due attention to their children. How many working parents in this day and age find the time to sit and do homework with their children in the evening? Tuitions are a solution for this problem as well.

These causes have made a huge impact on the social and educational system of our society. The quality of classroom teaching has been affected. Teachers are usually cognizant of the fact that 90 per cent of their students take tuitions making them fulfill their responsibility in class half-heartedly. The tutors are expected to pay special attention to the students instead. On the other hand, students also pay less attention in the classroom as they feel that their tutors will do the needful later. The level of respect for school teachers in the eyes of the pupil has gone down considerably due to this fact.

The self-directed learning capacity of students has been affected. Students have become dependent on tuitions and tutors for understanding concepts rather than making an effort on their own to investigate a subject and develop their own understanding. There goes the inquisitive nature and analytical and reflective thinking of the students. Where is the need for all that when you are getting readymade material from the tuitions centres to study for an examination? (Jones, 1999).

Children these days are spending most of their time in studies. First they attend school and then they go for tuitions. Remember the saying: "All work and no play"? This scenario causes a mental burden on students and restricts them from giving their minds a break and indulging in fun activities such as sports and other hobbies. Thus a child's social development is also under threat.

The parent-child relationship is also affected. Helping children with their studies at home is an important way for parents to bond with them and acquaint themselves with the habits, studying style, areas in need of improvement and strengths of their offspring (Marion, 2001). However, tuitions reduce the opportunity for parents to know their child better.

The negative aspects outweigh the positive ones. This existing situation lays an important responsibility on school authorities as well as parents. School authorities need to ensure that teachers fulfill their responsibility to the students. An effective monitoring mechanism needs to

be devised to ensure the quality of teaching in the classroom. The parents too should try to pay more attention to their children as they are the first and most important teachers in their children's lives.