A Narrative Inquiry of a Conflict-Affected Adolescent: Aspiration for Choosing Unique Pathways to Education and Employment

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Abstract:- Nepal's education system is curriculum-based, structured pedagogically, and centrally operated as well as controlled. An overloaded curriculum for professionally oriented students is another hurdle in their study. In such circumstances, this article focuses the study on the concepts and thoughts of deschooling and deconstruction of schools and curricula. How conflictaffected adolescents perceive this education system and school-level curricula is the main focus of the study of this article. Carrying out a narrative study of a conflictaffected adolescent and his family, this article tries to argue that the school-level curriculum is overloaded and also tries to reveal the facts of how students of professional aspiration describe and accept it. Considering the problems stated by the conflict-affected adolescent, this article argues for the deconstruction and deschooling of the school curriculum. What happens if one doesn't study unnecessary and unrelated subjects in his/her main curriculum? This article discusses the answers to this question and develops the arguments for why one should study several subjects under secondary level's curriculum.

Keywords:- Deschooling, Deconstruction, Overloaded, Satisfaction, Curriculum, Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, many researchers, scholars, and organizations were so engaged in giving attention to studying the connection between the field of education and conflict. Considerable attention has been paid to the description and analysis of the impact that conflicts have on education and to the question of how schools, teachers, and students can be protected (O'Melly, 2007, UNESCO 2010). Maximum studies and researches are focused on explaining mainly the connections between education and conflict. Between 1996 and 2006, Nepal experienced a violent civil conflict and political deadlock because of a Maoist insurgency. Nepal's armed rebellion was inspired by a 'revolutionary' ideology of Maoism. The goal, as argued by the Maoists, was to overthrow the 250 years long monarchy and its political structure to

establish a more inclusive and just society that would empower the historically suppressed under-privileged groups such as Dalits, women, ethnic minorities, sidelined marginalized and indigenous nationalities (Pherali, 2016). During that time, schools were at the forefront of the Maoist insurgency because rebels had extensively mobilized young people from schools to expand their political and military influence. Teachers and students were at the center as an integral part of the political campaign. Rebellions fought against the police and army directly in their posts and casualties were recorded as around 17000 people in total from both sides. Similarly, civil servants, police, the army, and other middle and upper-class village property owners were the targets of their insurgencies. In that scenario, one of my students named Ravi Hamal's (pseudo name to hide his identity) father was killed by rebels under the suspicion of spying on behalf of the army and police. Then the Hamal family (Ravi, his elder sister Reetu, and their mother Usha) were displaced from the hilly village of western Nepal. They migrated first to Dhangadi and finally to Kathmandu for a better study environment and facilities for Ravi and Reetu. Thus, Ravi, who came to Kathmandu as a victim of the conflict, became unique and reactive towards school education.

The Nepalese education system was traditionally oriented towards the Indian system and was known as the three-tier sixteen-year education system: 10 years of primary and secondary education, followed by 4 years of college-level studies and 2 years of master's education.

The current structure of education in Nepal is primary education called Basic Education consists of grades one through eight. Secondary levels are grades nine to twelve. Preprimary education is available in some areas, and students usually begin grade one at the age of five. A Basic Level Examination (BLE), previously known as District Level Examination (DLE), is given in grade eight while a national Secondary Education Exam (SEE), previously known as School Leaving Certificate (SLC), the examination is conducted at the end of grade 10, after completing Grade 12

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examination leads to the School Leaving Certificate (SLC). BLE is conducted and supervised by the local level government (Municipalities) whereas the National Examinations Board (NEB) conducts and supervises, SEE and 12th-grade exams.

Basic education in Nepal has the weightage of 500 marks in grades one through three, 600 marks four to six, and 800 marks in grades seven and eight. Similarly, at the secondary level, weightage is 800 marks in grades nine and ten and 600 marks in grades XI and XII. Such weights of the curriculum are generally carried by each subject of 100 marks (128 credit hours per year). This indicates that students at various levels have to study different numbers of subjects. Our evaluation system is a written test and every student is supposed to carry out a certain range of marks to get a certain grade to upgrade into the upper class. According to our education system, students are required to get at least a D+ grade to get admission to the next class. My student Ravi has a disagreement and different views about this system of education. He argues that if one wants to be a software developer, why he/she should get D+ grades in Nepali or Social studies subjects. Moreover, he argues why one should have to study such subjects that have no impact and support in his/her further study or profession.

John Dewey, 1912 has mentioned that education is not preparation for life, but education is life itself. This also clearly indicates that education is not for the preparation of life skills, it is how we live our life. It is believed that the curriculum should be developed in such a way that children can learn the life skills required for their life and their professions. But as a teacher, I used to experience that those burdensome curricula which have very little or no impact on future professions are worthless and boresome only.

Our education system even causes mental torture by giving fewer marks if students do not agree with the words of their teachers. This kind of heinous activity creates tension and stress, especially for those students who are disciplined, self-respecting, hardworking, curious, and intelligent. For those students, their secured marks matter the most in their life for further study as well as to be successful in their professional life (Magar, 2021).

So, there should be a fair evaluation system so that every student deserves an equal opportunity according to their level of knowledge presented in the class and written in the exam's answer sheets. However, the reality is different and bitter. Our teachers show negligence in terms of marks whether it be theoretically or practically. Teachers giving marks as per their desire is unjustified and unfair that can be called nepotism and favoritism as well because they do not give marks on the basis of what students have written but on the basis of teacher's judgement about that student. Similarly, some students do not fulfil their duty and are not under discipline as well (Magar, 2021). Some student even keep disagreement with the education they are forced to get and its evaluation system. If one wants to be a vocational trainer, why should he or she study boring and unrelated subjects?

Instead, if they can focus on related and practical subjects, certainly they can do better.

In the name of improving the education system, many commissions had been formed, and before two years, reports of high-level education commissions were published (MOE, 2019). Many programs and activities were implemented but the condition of the education system has remained the same as always. For a change in education, only plans, programs, and activities are not enough, there should be a change in mentality. Unless we think differently, we cannot bring a drastic change to our education system. So, through this article, I have tried to reveal the facts of the logical disagreement of an adolescent student why he is against this education system.

> Theoretical explanation of deconstruction of schools and deschooling; Literature notions

Educational achievements of the students in the community are measured in terms of their participation at the schools (Bartling & Friesike, 2014). The major part of achieving education for all, schools are considered the proper place since their establishment in the last 300 years ago (Soegiono et al., 2018). The institutionalization of schools indicates that the schools are the primary learning service provider. The major source of learning and achieving knowledge is the schools but there are some exceptions in which knowledge can be gathered by other means.

In the year 1971 AD, Austrian Philosopher and Educator Ivan Illich published a book entitled "Deschooling Society" and argued for an educational model in which children can choose what they want to learn with the guidance and support of adults. He had believed that the traditional education system, where children have to follow a unique curriculum and the same schedule, kills curiosity and creativity (Illich, 1971). Not all children are of the same standard and level in academics, they may have different aims, approaches, and thoughts about their future. That is why they seek different methods and theories of education as the model for their learning. It is universally believed that schools and other learning institutions are not capable of providing the best possible education for some or most students. Modern education provides a structured and compulsory curriculum for the students, which may not be suitable and interested for all students. In such a situation, some students may oppose the system and challenge the curriculum. "The traditional school focuses too much on exams, the academic success of the students, the curriculum and other factors that end up producing exhausted teachers and students who do not enjoy or potentialize their learning" (Anaya, 2016 in Delgado, 2020). There is an argument of several educators that the schools should be deschooled because students are like the prisoners inside the schools (Delgado, 2020). "It is essential to deschool students, to remove them from the negativity, the control, the prescribed, the imposed, the known and repeated, so they go on to build their educational process with the passion for learning and knowing" (Delgado, 2020, p. 2). According to Lane (2018), students in schools are like prisoners: "Learning is a process of doing what they are told—when, how, and where they are told to do it. As with former prisoners, 'former schoolers' discover freedom is difficult. Prisoners are denied the simple freedoms

we take for granted. What to do with our free time. When to eat. When to sleep or exercise."

It is better to have a student-centered education to empower them to decide which areas of interest they want to concentrate one or a more structured modality that continuously guides them to develop their potential. It is possible only if schools are deschooled. Wexler (2020) points out that children are capable of wanting to learn something that they know, so they should be introduced to these things (Wexler, 2020). According to Anaya (2016), it is necessary to take out anything that does not promote the integral development of the student, and that prevents the educator from teaming up with them in their educational process (Anaya, 2016 in Delgado, 2020).

Reconstruction of the learning process is a postmodern approach to setting up the learning structures which think beyond the simple structure of the frontal classwork, traditional group work, or socio-metrically constructed classroom management (Arato, 2014). Under this process, the given social structure will be broken down and a new structure will be set up within a class of learners belonging to the same learning group to enhance cooperation among students with different backgrounds. We can say more accurately that by using cooperative structure, ordinary and hierarchical learning structures can be dislodged which also can attempt to dislodge the social structure that determines access to knowledge and common learning for socially disadvantaged children in our classrooms (Aronson et al., 1992). Dislodging hierarchical, discriminative, and therefore anti-democratic structures of learning by setting up cooperative structures, which provide increased access and higher academic standards, entails a deconstructive model. Destructing anti-democratic structures of learning by enhancing cooperation including all of the participants of the learning process - in a structurally guaranteed way - is a constructive process as well therefore we can call this post-structural approach a de-constructive one (Arato, 2014). "Destructing anti-democratic structure" refers to the process of dismantling or breaking down systems, institutions, or practices that are opposed to or incompatible with democratic values and principles. This could include structures such as authoritarian governments, totalitarian regimes, or organizations that promote discrimination and inequality. The constructive learning process that is also a deconstructive one is known as constructive/deconstructive learning. This approach to learning involves both building new knowledge and skills while also challenging and critically examining existing assumptions and beliefs. Having structured the learning process cooperatively, we can ensure higher academic achievement, decreasing academic gaps, higherlevel reasoning skills, better mental balance, good self-esteem, and non-discriminative inter-ethnic relationships by dislodging hierarchical, anti-democratic structures, and destructive interpersonal and intrapersonal relations (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Destructive interpersonal and intrapersonal relations can have a significant impact on mental health, well-being,

and quality of life. It is important to recognize and address these behaviors to prevent further harm and promote healing. This may involve seeking support from a mental health professional, developing healthy coping strategies, setting boundaries in relationships, and cultivating positive self-talk and self-care practices. Both cooperative learning and deschooling involve a shift away from traditional forms of education, they approach this shift from different angles. Cooperative learning focuses on improving the quality of traditional classroom education, while de-schooling challenges the very notion of traditional schooling itself. The "puzzles" which are represented in our public education systems are clear segregation of learners with different cultural and social backgrounds, increasing academic gaps, lower academic achievement, lack of success in the field of personal and social competence-development, etc., in one word the lack of inclusion (Arato, 2014). The products of our education system are less competent, lower academic achiever and mostly failure in life.

II. METHOD

A narrative research method under qualitative design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) is applied for collecting and interpreting the information. A single person is selected as a research participant as prescribed by Creswell (2012) which suggests that a single person can be used for collecting data through the collection of stories, reporting individual's experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual (Creswell, 2012). I took the interviews of the participant of this study a conflict-affected adolescent boy, Ravi, who studied in Grade X of my school in Kathmandu.

As I am familiar with Ravi, his sister, and even his mother, there was no difficulty to carry out the narratives with him. Even though, I had separately treated him for the collection of his narrations, disagreements, arguments, and stories. To maintain ethical integrity, I told him that his views and versions would be accommodated as a part of my study. But I assured him that his right to anonymity and privacy would not be disclosed and his identity would never be disclosed in any writing works. To take him in confidence and to reveal all the views he had; I tried my best to create a neutral situation for the interviews. I had carried out the focused interviews with Ravi sometimes in my office and sometimes in his home. During such interviews, I did not use recording devices because many times I had already heard Ravi's disagreement and so prepared some notes of important and highlighted quotes. On the same evening, I tried to prepare the descriptive notes of the interviews with all arguments, rejections, and feelings about the education system and profession. While writing his descriptive notes, I was fully attentive and aware not to understate or overstate his version, so that his views will appear the same as he wanted to express. For this, I had honestly attempted not to impress him during our conversations and truly struggled to transcribe his version without any biasedness. For the verification of his arguments

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and also to minimize the researcher's bias, I had also interviewed his mother and she has supported his views and said that from few years back how he had started defending that there is no use in this education system and how he had thought it to be a successful software developer. There are several methods for transcribing narrative stories, including verbatim, intelligent verbatim, and summary. I have transcribed Ravi's narratives by making summary of his narrations.

From such descriptive narrations, I had prepared some vignettes which in turn coded to generate the themes. For this, I had adopted a thematic network analysis model (Attride-Sterling, 2001) through which at first basic themes were developed. From the basic themes, catchy and highlighted organizing themes were collected, and finally, from different organizing themes, a few global themes were generated which are discussed in the results and discussion. The main aim of this analysis was to develop and capture the striking themes from the views and versions that Ravi had expressed during our conversations.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Nepal had encountered a civil war for around a decade in which schools, teachers, and local people with some land and good jobs were the target of rebellions. As a result, many property owners were killed and their families were displaced from hilly villages. Many such families finally migrated to the capital city Kathmandu for better education of their children as well as for safety and better lifestyles. I have chosen one member of such a family, Ravi for my study. Ravi, who belongs to a high-class Thakuri family having their own house in Kathmandu valley, was good enough to study when he joined my school in Kathmandu. As he is my student, I have many times sat with him to discuss the static progress of his study. In such talks, many times Ravi had argued about the education system which he was compelled to go through. I had noticed his rejection of our education system in which he had to study various subjects unwillingly. After carrying out several focused interviews with Ravi, and analyzing his transcriptions I have generated the following major themes.

> The center of education excellence: Kathmandu

Theoretically, basic education is free and compulsory for all in Nepal. It is mentioned in the constitution of Nepal as basic needs and child rights but its implementation part is not much strict and convincing as people attract to public schools. Because of political intervention and the unwillingness of bureaucracy, the standard of public sector education is deteriorating and as a consequence, there is an increasing trend of admitting the child to private schools in the thirst for quality education. Similarly, in the search for quality education, people migrate from suburban areas to urban areas. Pierre Bourdieu (1985) argued that it is not only money that gives the wealthy power, but cultural assets too. He argued that the children of middle-class or wealthier parents are likely

to have knowledge, behavior, attitudes and cultural experiences that ensure that they succeed in education (Pierre Bourdieu (1986) cited in Richardson, 1986). So middle-class and high-class people search for a better place to admit their children. In the context of Nepal, mainly conflict-affected and upper-class people have a choice of Kathmandu as their destination for quality education and a better lifestyle. An estimated 200,000 people have been displaced as a result of the conflict, with the far-western districts of Nepal being the worst affected (Singh et al., 2007). According to their narratives of Ravi based on our conversation, when Ravi and his sister were studying at one of the private schools in Dhangadhi, there were not any facilities and strictness in the study. Ravi used to play most of the time with his friends so he could not progress in study. Ravi's mother talked with the teachers and even the administration of the school but there was no remarkable change in the teaching-learning patterns.

In my Dhangadi school, there was no assignment system. Most of the time we used to play outside of the classrooms and we were free to do whatever we liked. No teachers had pressurized for the study and we seldom study seriously in school and so same in the home as well.

In that situation, Indu (Ravi's mother) was much worried about the children's studies. In the meantime, they purchased a house in Kathmandu, and Reetu (Ravi's sister) started insisting Indu shift to Kathmandu and study in a good school so that they can do better and make their future good. Indu thought that on one side children have no father to give proper guidance and, on another side, the condition of the study of the children is also pathetic. So, she decided to shift into Kathamndu.

I was so worried about my children's future. One thing is that they have lost their father and another thing is there is no good study here at Dhangadi. So, I decided to shift to Kathmandu.

A system that focuses on quality education allows children to develop and grow in supportive school environments and at the same time challenging, which nurtures them to become confident, have good self-esteem, and be willing to strive forward yet at the same time feel a sense of responsibility towards others in their community (Badjatya, 2016). Guardians usually look for all sorts of facilities in education institutes through which their children can prosper in the future. Ravi told me in his conversation that his sister Reetu particularly insisted on shifting to Kathmandu for better and quality education for their bright future.

My sister insisted on my mother regularly so that mother decided to shift from Dhangadi to Kathmandu for our study. Other family members also agreed on the shifting for our better study.

Well-managed schools and classrooms contribute to educational quality. Students, teachers, and administrators should agree upon school and classroom rules and policies, and these should be clear and understandable. Order, constructive discipline, and reinforcement of positive behavior communicate a seriousness of purpose to students (Craig et al., 1998).

These all highlight that, in general, people look for a better place for the better education of their children. In this story, the Bam family was already victimized by the insurgency and they haven't seen any prospect in the future from Dhangadi school so they shifted to Kathmandu for quality education for the children. This indicates that still Kathmandu is considered a place for excellence in education.

➤ Does more money make us happier?

Although some studies show that wealthier people tend to be happier, prioritizing money over time can have the opposite effect (Dunn & Courtney, 2020). Of course, that doesn't mean that one should turn down the next opportunity offered. A large number of evidence shows that, on average, wealthier people are happier. But making lots of money will not inevitably boost happiness. How one spends, saves, and thinks about money shapes how much joy one gets from it (Dunn & Courtney, 2020). How people become happy is a debatable matter of this era because happiness is a state of comfort and satisfaction in the mind. Some people work for their whole life and earn a lot of money but never become happy. On the other hand, some people enjoy a happy life even without earning much money. So, for a certain level, money matters for happiness but after that, only money does not give much more satisfaction and happiness. In my focus interview, Ravi had argued with me that after studying even if he earned a lot of money, he would not be happy. In his opinion, if he lived in comfort without the pressure of studying and earning money, he would become happier and more satisfied.

Even if I study well and earn a lot of money, I may not be happy and satisfied. Instead of working in a bounded time frame, if I do some business then also, I can earn money. Money only is not all thing, there is life and I want to live my life with joy.

According to Maslow's theory, humans are compelled to satisfy physiological needs first to pursue higher levels of intrinsic satisfaction. To advance higher-level needs in Maslow's hierarchy, physiological needs must be met first. But those who have fulfilled their higher-level needs too, are more satisfied and happier. "Just to satisfy the needs only, I don't even need to study and work because I already have enough property for my comfortable life", Ravi told me in our conversation. "Then Why are you studying?" I asked him. What he replied made me feel strange and compelled to think of him differently. He had replied that he was studying only for the sake of his family, especially for his mother.

Life satisfaction is a bit more complex than it seems; the term is sometimes used interchangeably with happiness, but they are indeed two separate concepts. Life satisfaction is the evaluation of one's life as a whole, not simply one's current level of happiness (Ackerman, 2021). There are different views about life satisfaction. "[A]n overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive" (Beutell, 2006). More specifically, life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads (Veenhoven, 1991). Although related, happiness and life satisfaction are not the same things. Happiness is an immediate, in-the-moment experience; although enjoyable, it is ultimately fleeting. A healthy life certainly includes moments of happiness, but happiness alone usually does not make for a fulfilling and satisfying life. My student Ravi wanted this type of happiness in his life. He wanted to live joyfully every moment of his life. In his words, he did not want to study if it was only for earning purposes. He said that he could earn more by becoming a software developer by practicing not by taking a formal degree.

What will I become by studying BA or MA sir? Officer? How much I can earn? 40,000? I can earn more than that without studying for that formal degree, just doing practice. To become a software developer, there is no need for a formal degree sir, it needs only practice.

And in his words, investing money and time to get a formal degree is worthless. To get a formal degree, he needs 10+2+4 years of education but to become a software developer he needs only 1 year. Next year onwards, he can start earning. He asked me one very unanswerable question in our interview. "Sir, how much has Bill Gates studied? Do you Know? I was dumb silent. He means neither formal degree only matters in life, nor does money matter a lot in our life. The most important thing in life is to live life meaningfully. These all contexts indicate that people may not be satisfied and happy by getting a formal moment is lived happily and peacefully.

> Overloaded Curriculum

In the secondary level curriculum, there are 8 subjects with full marks of 100 each. There are 6 compulsory subjects and the rest 2 are optional. Students have choices in these 2 subjects only. And even in these 2 subjects also schools usually do not give many choices because the schools need more human resources. It means, in the name of optional subjects, schools force their children to choose those subjects which schools offer to them. Public schools do not show the willingness to provide many choices whereas private schools do not want to give various choices because of cost-effectiveness.

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Curriculum overloaded can be a stress to students and teachers and even serve as an impediment to learning. Analyses suggest methods for embedding subjects or competencies and ways to set subject-specific goals. Examples from countries serve as lessons learned or potential strategies that can be adapted to avoid curriculum overloaded. The curriculum has definite objectives which are considered to be achieved while crossing a certain level of study.

The size of the curriculum is considered the main cause of curriculum overload. There are claims that there are too many subjects or too much content and learning materials are considered too difficult for children. Overlap or duplication of contents has been identified as an overload. Time has also been considered inadequate to allow for the coverage of the targeted content (Peper, 2008). In school environments that are disadvantaged, poorly resourced, and poorly staffed, the effects of an overloaded curriculum and the desire to keep up with this or that latest technique in pedagogy or technology may lead to a genuine crisis. Overloaded curriculum results in students quitting the course in the middle. It also creates boredom for the students and consequently, their performance will be decreased gradually (Campbell, 2014).

In my interview with Ravi, he showed his reluctance in studying these extra subjects which are not related to his aimed profession. He told me that he wanted to be a software designer and for that he didn't want to study subjects like EPH, Social studies, or Science. He claimed that without studying such subjects also, he could become a software developer. According to him, to become a software developer, he needs no formal degree, it needs only practice. Ravi's mother also told me in frustration and tiredness, he always argued this way and never studies at the home.

Sir, I am fading off and frustrated with him, he always says that he wanted to be a software developer. And for that, it is not necessary to pass SEE, BA, or MA, it needs only practice. If he is determined to be a software developer, why should he study these all-unnecessary subjects?

This way, a conflict-affected adolescent argued about the overload of the unnecessary curriculum which overburdened him. He also argued that if he gets the chance of studying only those subjects which are related to his aspiration profession, he would do better and could show better performance in every exam. Nowadays, the school curriculum is somehow designed as a vocational stream from grade IX, but they're also students have to study some compulsory subjects. These all vignettes conclude that the school curriculum is overloaded and so it is overburdened to the students who have the determination of choosing a certain profession.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though education is free for all and available in all parts of the country, the quality is not the same everywhere. Because of the facilities and availability of able and professional teachers, still Kathmandu is the center of excellence in quality education. To ensure qualitative education, teachers ought to be prepared, supervised, and monitored closely. On one hand, the administration—whether it's the government or private school boards—should schedule regular professional development that exposes teachers to new methods and provides opportunities to reflect on their practices. On the other hand, it should also hold teachers accountable if students are not engaged in lessons or if they do not demonstrate grade-level achievements. Kathmandu, being the capital city of the country has an ample number of educational institutions, experienced teachers, and wellfacilitated infrastructures. People prefer Kathmandu as a better choice for career counseling and exposure to extracurricular activities as well.

Similarly, education is for a better life and a prosperous future. After studying up to a level, generally, people either start their career in certain jobs or do their own business. In both situations, earning matters a lot. If one earns plenty of money can enjoy life and can be satisfied. But satisfaction is a different thing according to this study. Earning a lot of money cannot make everybody's life happier and more satisfied. One can be happy and satisfied in life if he/she lived his/her life their way. The value of life lies not in the length of days, but in the use, we make of them. According to Mahatma Gandhi, happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony. This study supports this logic about satisfaction and happiness.

And school curriculum is overburdened and overloaded for certain professional aspiration students. Instead of studying some extra subjects, if they are given chance to practice their interested subjects only, it is sure that they will do better in those subjects. But our structured curriculum doesn't allow students to learn what they aspect and want to study. Not only studying the subjects unnecessary in their perspective, they are compelled to pass that by securing a certain percentage in exams also. That creates irritation and frustration for the students and they gradually start escaping from those classes. Then their performance will be deteriorated because of which they won't be able to choose their expected subjects in their higher studies and consequently, they cannot enter into the profession which they have aspirated.

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