

# Dwindling attention span of students

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IS THE attention span of students declining globally? The answer to this question is complex. The students expect that the class will be as entertaining as YouTube contents. The class becomes another mode of entertainment for them. If teachers fail to grab their attention with interesting topics, they lose interest. Sometimes, they are forced to attend classes so that they can survive in the academic race. In the post-modern world, students have to come under the same umbrella to embark on the journey of chasing jobs. Even the students cannot be blamed for their behaviour and lack of attention. I think they are victims of the action-packed time of the tinsel world.

There was a time when university teachers used to have exclusive access to knowledge because of the unavailability of information at the fingertips. Lectures were exhibitions of self-congratulatory monologues. Students did not have the guts to ask questions because of the absence of a culture of dissent and an interesting two-way discussion in the classroom. Apart from some exceptions, all the teachers used to discourage questions from students. Their discomfort with dealing with questions

became visible on their face. The situation has not improved much today. When one of my students asked questions in another course, she was rebuffed by a teacher that she had been making the topic of the lecture convoluted. This resulted in her curiosity being nipped in the bud. Those who want to pay attention are, thus, silenced in their pursuit of knowledge from the instructor.

No one asked for entertainment options to be available at one's fingertips. When these became easily accessible, everyone became victims of entertainment wildfire. Students come to the classroom with their smartphones having multiple functions. Those who are addicted to phones cannot take their eyes away from the screen. Even if they do it for a few moments, they are again pulled towards the vortex of their social media world. Once, phones were available only in houses and at work. When mobiles arrived, they were also used initially only to make calls, send text messages or play games. Screen time started competing with reading time. The real book found its competitor on Facebook. Most students used to pay more attention to class because of the absence of distraction from smartphones. During my student days in Dhaka University, there was no interruption from smartphones. It is wise to say that smartphones have hijacked our smartness as we have become slaves to technologies.

Some teachers are famous for reading out PowerPoint slides without having any discussion in the classroom. Students get bored with such lectures. Teachers have to make it clear to the class that they are not knowledgeable about everything they discuss in the class. The fake sense of superiority created by some certificates cannot help students to question the legitimacy of the existing knowledge. Since teachers are not Google, they do not have answers to every question. If I do not have an answer to a question, I say that I will get back to the students in the next class.

Class duration is another factor in the lack of attention these days. Students lose interest in the class content after an hour. Teachers continue their lectures to complete the syllabus without realising that

students' attention span dwindles after one hour of class. The situation is such that if students do not concentrate, it is their problem.

Some students deliberately take more courses than they can handle. As a result, they struggle with the course load and their performance gets compromised. The attention span that the increased course load demands from the students becomes a mammoth task. Some students want to graduate fast, but I do not find any valid reason for it. Sometimes, family problems may also contribute to their decreasing attention in the class.

Course type is also responsible for students' lack of attention. In foundation courses, students most of the time do not find any relevance to their majors. One student told me that she had not found any relevance of mathematics courses for her major in the English literature. She further added that she had always feared mathematics, but at the university level, she was given new doses. She had to surmount her fear and complete those courses even though she hated them.

Sleep deprivation stems from students' sleep habits and directly impacts their attention span. Sometimes, large gaps between classes can leave students feeling disengaged. Although they remain present physically, their minds remain somewhere else. As there are so many things to do using one's smartphone, they do not sleep until late at night. The next day comes as a merciless big boss to extract energy from sleep-deprived bodies. Despite knowing the tribulation of sleeping for a few hours, they cannot stop the temptation of compulsive scrolling for exciting contents.

Not having the desired discipline is another reason for lack of attention. Parental imposition and not meeting the criteria for selection in a particular discipline contribute directly to the evaporation of interest and attention. One student wanted to pursue her major in law, but she was doing it in environmental science and management due to her father's persuasion. Although she accepted her fate, she showed an undying passion for her desired major.

Not having any interest in studies is one of the main reasons for lack of attention among many students. We have to understand that it is extraneous to them and our expectations that everyone will be equally engaged in studies are overambitious. As white-collar jobs are available only to degree holders from reputed universities, students have no option but to give in and concentrate on studies. But some of them decide to quit and withdraw from the academic steamroller. I know a student who has developed the habit of discontinuing his studies after attending a few classes. He then disappears from the campus until the next semester.

In this age of short-lived reels, students struggle to cope with the tug of war between digital entertainment and academic training. Their digital preoccupation paves the way for a limited space for studies, either for job hunting or as a status symbol. Post-modern students, surrounded by internet invasion, do not know where this devastating stream will take them. The gap between our expectations and the performance barometer of students will always remain a Gordian knot for academia.

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