**[Studying habits](https://www.dawn.com/news/1798799/studying-habits)**

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The writer is a teacher educator, author and fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK. The views expressed are her own and do not reflect the views of her employer

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WE’VE often heard human beings are creatures of habit and many of us have become habitual complainers. Each working day seems to be a burden, each conversation drags us into the alleyways of despair. Habits also tend to mushroom fast and furiously through society until they become traps. Few can resist the growing tide of habits. Studying can be inculcated as a healthy habit in children; yet, we often see students resisting it, perhaps because it is presented as a chore.

A departure from habits, which become a comfort zone for many, would need some conscious forays into planning, reading, implementation. This brings us back to the question: what is our education system really teaching our children? A school leader sighed helplessly during a conversation: “Let’s face it, our children don’t read and they won’t.” Why do we give up so quickly? And how exactly will our children develop a growth mindset, ideals, dreams and perspectives without reading? How will they sustain professional careers without consciously reading to develop skills, learn and implement goals?

We often talk about 21st-century skills but choose to fester in our last century mindsets. There isn’t much change in our classic brick-and-mortar schools in the last perhaps 50 years and students are still seen striving for grades, not thriving in their passion to study. If studying habits could be inculcated as something to be proud of, we would find more students being driven by internal motivation.

Educators, for example, hope that they can teach creativity and critical thinking, and enable students to learn through collaboration and communication. Yet, there is little opportunity or expertise in classrooms to bring these wonderful skills into play. Most teachers find themselves racing against time and, in doing so, fall back on their default habit of reading to the children, explaining, paraphrasing and translating. The students have little agency in what they learn and how they get to practise it.

Students have little agency in what they learn.

In a world where students get the immersive experience of being actors and players in their digital video-gaming experiences, we cannot expect them to turn into still and patient auditory learners in class. Not only the curriculum but also teaching practices require a shift towards replicating immersive learning experiences in class where students get an opportunity to lead, learn, argue, play and compete. We see very young children buying video games and diving deep into playing the very same day — they don’t need any guidance to unravel even the most complex game. They teach themselves as they are motivated to do so.

Reading can be a motivating, immersive experience just like video games, especially if students are given digital opportunities. Where that isn’t possible, involving children in reading groups, with hands-on projects related to books may be a good starting point to motivate primary-level students. Giving up on reading as a habit isn’t an option as it is not only a skill for life, but also critical as a job requirement.

The habit of not reading or studying only for exams may be difficult to break but the investment of time and effort in developing good reading habits can pay dividends for life. For example, many students view reading and studying as a time-consuming, complaint-worthy activity that they have come to resist and resent. If we could motivate students to study and enjoy it exactly as they enjoy video gaming, there would be no pressure or reasons to complain. Studying habits develop as a proxy to strong reading skills. Most parents have fallen into the trap of coaxing and cajoling their children into studying, particularly memorising for tests and exams. Much of the learnt material is discarded from memory soon after the assessments.

For long-term sustained achievement, studying can be skillfully intertwined in the students’ daily habits, especially if they are motivated by an internal drive. Much of that drive comes from enjoying the content, engaging with it beyond the classroom, and learning to experience studying, not as a chore but as necessary building blocks to growth and success. If these building blocks are ignored at the primary levels, students get into a firefighting mode at the secondary level where they cram the material before every exam which is not only distressful, but also sets them up for failure.

Excellence is often the result of consistent habits that are contributing to success, not short-term achievement based on a firefighting attempt at getting through exams. It’s time to revisit the habits that our students have developed over time.

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