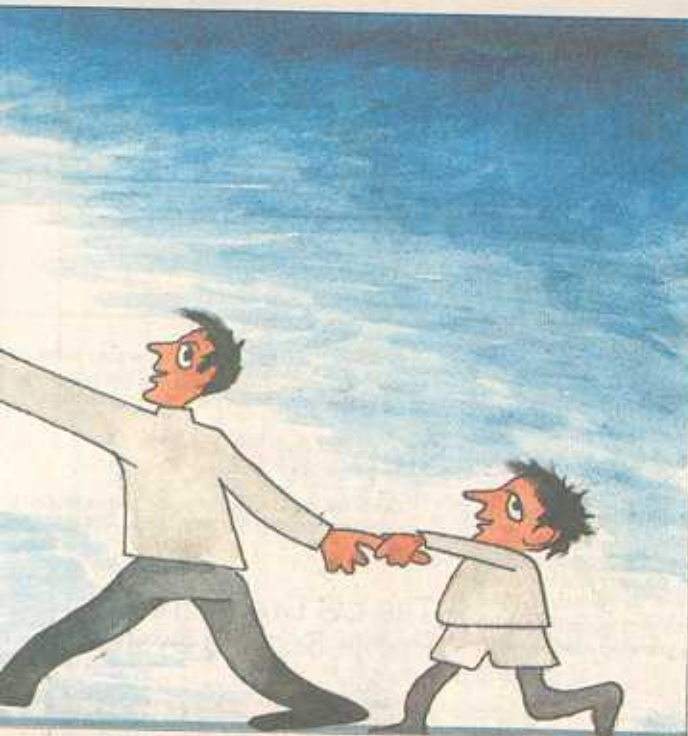


# of training teachers

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address all the aforementioned factors simultaneously. This would have been the ideal approach but might not be possible at least for now. So what can be done until the time that such an approach is employed? Should our teachers wait until we will have good schools buildings, with appropriate facilities, ideal class size, a contemporary curriculum, well-written textbooks and an effective assessment system? Perhaps we cannot afford to wait that long. One key factor that can play a vital role in improving the quality of education and which is usually underestimated is the teacher. If properly empowered through teacher education, a teacher should be able to make considerable impact on the quality of education that is imparted.

Unfortunately, no serious attempt has ever been made by any government to enhance teacher training opportunities in our country. I am familiar with these so-called 'crash courses' in

which thousands of teachers are forcibly 'trained' in one go. The ultimate aim of such courses seems to be to produce the inflated number of 'trained teachers' and to show this 'success' to senior policymakers and to get letters of appreciation. Such teacher training gimmicks are of little use and bring no discernible change or improvement in the quality of education.

What then is happening in our teacher education programmes? Why have they not been effective in bringing a significant qualitative change in education? Most of our teacher education programmes focus on teaching skills. Little attempt has been made to bring about conceptual and attitudinal change. My experience as a teacher educator tells me that no matter how many new techniques and methods are given to the teacher, if their fixed educational beliefs are not 'unfrozen' and if they do not re-conceptualize fundamental educational notions, then

change is very difficult. If we are convinced that teachers should be empowered to improve the quality of education in Pakistan we need to build in a strong component of re-conceptualization of fundamental notions of education, e.g., education, knowledge, assessment, teacher, student, and educational change. For instance, teachers should be facilitated to re-conceptualize the notion of knowledge.

The notion of education is the foremost notion to be 'unfrozen' and re-conceptualized. In most of our schools the function of education is considered the transmission of knowledge, skills and values. This view of education is conservative as it highlights the significance of conserving knowledge and values. Consequently, the emphasis is on transmission and if education is transmitting the knowledge of one generation to another, it is considered effective education. In the prevailing predominant paradigm in Pakistan, knowledge is viewed as static and 'out there', something that can be learned through a behaviouristic model of learning. This model lays extra emphasis on imitation and repetition. This view of knowledge requires a lot of memorization and cramming on the part of students as there is hardly any need, in this paradigm, to reflect and think critically.

Related to this view of knowledge is the conservative view of learners and the learning process. The general concept of student in mainstream schools of Pakistan goes back to the behaviouristic view of the learner who is considered an 'empty vessel' or a clean slate who knows nothing and whose sole responsibility is to absorb the knowledge delivered by teachers. A metaphor that describes this kind of students is that of a sponge. A good student or learner in this paradigm is the one who sits in the class quietly, behaves nicely, never disagrees

with the teacher, hardly asks any question and has a sharp memory to repeat what the teacher has taught.

The conservative view of teacher is the one who transmits knowledge, skills, and values. The primary aim of the teacher in this paradigm is to prepare the students for the examination. The teacher presents himself to the students as a model, who is perfect in all respects, someone who should know the answers to any question on this planet. For this purpose the teacher can use any measure from persuasion to restraint, from coercion to even physical punishment. A good teacher in this paradigm tries to fill the empty vessels (the students) and expects from students to conserve this knowledge and reproduce it when required. There is hardly any room for disagreement on the part of the students.

Another important notion that needs to be re-conceptualized is educational change. This view is also largely traditional behaviour where the whole emphasis of school effectiveness is laid on observable changes where the impact can be measured in the stipulated time. This view of change, very popular with donors and projects, does not tap on the important aspects of change for the only reason such a kind of change is qualitative in nature and difficult to measure strategically.

In this article I tried to challenge the notion of quality of education advocating that effective teacher education could be a powerful source to bring qualitative change. I stressed the need to improve the quality of teacher education programme by not just focusing on pedagogical skills but also by facilitating change at conceptual and attitudinal levels. ■

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