

# Why I want to quit teaching

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20.4.03  
Dawn Education

**I** DID my master's in chemistry from the University of Karachi a couple of years back. KU is still like a second home for me and I must say I am lucky that I had some very good teachers. It is because of their love and respect that I chose to become a teacher.

There is a saying about being a teacher in our society: "Jo kuch nahi ban-tay woh teacher bun jatey hein" ('Those who can't become anything become teachers'). But this is not the case with me. I intentionally became a teacher although I had many other job opportunities related to my subject. Besides, there was no pressure from my family not to take up this profession.

However, after two years of teaching in private schools I now feel like quitting the profession. There are many reasons for this, and one of them probably has to do with the fact that everyone seems to take teachers for granted: from students and their parents to those who run the schools.

In any profession, and probably more so in teaching, the working environment plays a key role. A good working environment is directly proportional to the efficiency of workers. If a person is relaxed, he can do a lot of work efficiently but if somebody is standing on your head

all the time then you cannot do even routine work. In most private schools, the workload on teachers is immense. The administration puts all its energies toward making life difficult for teachers. By doing this, I think, those who run the administration try and hide their own weaknesses.

The adage that teaching is a dignified profession does not seem to apply to private schools. Here, students are given nice comfortable chairs to sit on while teachers are made to regret if they even sit down for a minute during a class. I wonder if forcing a teacher to stand during his or her lecture in any way raises the quality of teaching. The only thing this probably does is force the teacher to look for another, more accommodating, place to work at.

Another step which private schools like to do is to make teachers take classes after school hours. I was educated at a prestigious girls school in Karachi but we never had any classes after school

hours or on Saturdays. Sometimes teachers are asked to come in late to 'discuss' issues related to their teaching or the curriculum. All this can easily be done within normal school hours, even during the break, so to call teachers after schools seems strange. In many private schools, the administrations regularly carries out observations of their teachers. The reason for this, ostensibly, is to monitor performance but what it usually ends up doing is that it puts enormous pressure on the teacher being 'observed'.

An observation is nothing more than a one-man show, written and choreo-

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In private schools there is sometimes undue pressure on the administration from parents. This happens because market forces have penetrated into the education sector also. Schools are extremely reluctant to do anything that jeopardizes the relationship they have with their 'customers' — students and the parents who pay the fees. And just like in any business concern, especially of the capitalist kind, this happens at the expense of the 'labour', who in this case happen to be the teachers

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graphed by the principal, and in which the teacher is but an actor who has to do as he is told. The students are allowed to participate but they prefer to be spectators and pass comments after the 'show'. In any case, the point of carrying out an observation seems to make little sense because all teachers know in advance that they will be 'observed' and hence they try and come fully prepared. If the administration is really concerned about academics then that can be achieved by the principal taking a round everyday and observing teachers discreetly, without making them feel that they are being watched or monitored.

Then there is lesson planning. To be very honest, I never realized the importance of lesson planning until I studied it during the course of my B.Ed. degree. It seems a huge pain but all teachers have to do it, or rather, they are forced to do it by the administration. The main idea of planning is to teach your students within a particular and ordered framework.

The problem is that most private schools require their teachers to write a lesson plan for literally every class that they are supposed to teach. Other than the fact that it might not be humanly possible to stick to such a plan for every class, the whole process can be quite tedious and time-consuming.

The reality is that most teachers take the whole exercise of lesson-planning as a mere formality and then don't care if they don't follow it. Some schools ask their teachers to submit a plan for the whole month. This can take up to a week and then one submits it to the principal. However, what the principal does first is

that she points out all the grammatical and spelling mistakes that the teacher has made and returns it for correction. Then it is re-submitted after which it is approved. What this all achieves, other than the fact that the teacher might improve his or her spellings, is open to debate. As far I understand, lesson planning was introduced for the convenience of teachers but private schools use it as a tool to criticize their teaching staff, and to drive home the point that the principal is the boss.

In my view good teachers always come to the class prepared whether they are asked or not. The other problem in private schools is that there is sometimes undue pressure on the administration

from parents. This happens because market forces have penetrated into the education sector also. Schools are extremely reluctant to do anything that jeopardizes the relationship they have with their 'customers': students and the parents who pay the fees. And just like in any business concern, especially of the capitalist kind, this happens at the expense of the 'labour', who, in this case, happen to be the teachers.

The other, perhaps more disturbing, consequence of this is that over time students have become more casual with their teachers. Cases of students openly insulting their teachers are on the rise and the worse part is that school administrations, by and large, do nothing to check this misbehaviour.

I admit teachers are no angels. They can be wrong sometimes, but what about the whole process of learning. Is it really possible to learn from a person whom one does not respect? ■