**[Improving skills](https://www.dawn.com/news/1831725/improving-skills)**

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MANY teachers complain about the lack of continuous professional development opportunities or resources to update their teaching and learning skills. Like any other profession, teaching calls for creating opportunities on the job, taking initiative to learn new techniques and to continually revise teaching methods for greater efficiency. Churning the same wheel has never been gratifying — at best, it may help teachers keep their jobs and continue on the same path for decades.

The world is evolving rapidly and those in employment today are being referred to as Generation Transition for they have had to keep abreast of massive changes to stay relevant in their professions. AI may not be taking up teachers’ jobs — at least yet — but it has done enough to show teachers what they don’t know and how much there is to learn. It has shown more efficient ways of working in a minimal amount of time. From strategy to projected outcomes, from planning to design and execution, it has a quicker solution for work that would otherwise take days if not months to accomplish.

With new developments in technology, creating opportunities for oneself has never been easier. Learning new skills or upgrading old ones no longer requires huge effort. Most teaching programmes are free and can be accessed anywhere, anytime. The doors to teaching and learning from successful trends in other societies are no longer closed. There is a treasure trove of research for teachers to dip into. It is now possible for teachers to learn from the professional experiences of individuals far and wide and to stay abreast of global developments, without relying on colleagues and managers to fill their coffers with knowledge and expertise.

A teacher who has taught successfully for decades wrote to me recently, worrying that he is no longer relevant, not motivated enough and that his managers don’t value him the way they did before. The question that may need to be answered is, ‘what is he doing differently to upgrade his teaching and to enable or empower his students?’ Motivation can come from external factors, and appreciation or approval from colleagues may be temporarily beneficial, but external factors are never sustainable. Reliance on the external environment means we change when our environment changes and we no longer feel worthwhile when our colleagues don’t pump up the gas to help us feel valued.

The more successful teachers find motivation within themselves.

Instead of relying on external factors, the more successful teachers find motivation within themselves to upgrade their skills and contribute to reshaping their external environment. Often teachers feel demotivated as they procrastinate, delay grading or reuse lesson plans knowing well that new, upgraded ones are required. They wait to be called out on that, wait to be told what to do, wait for an opportunity to feel better and to do better. Yet, a lot can change with an individual’s willingness to take initiative — to start with doing a few things differently and watch the outcomes closely.

A small example is that of a teacher who complains through the term about a couple of students who do not study, don’t complete their homework and don’t show interest in class. A good place to start would be to do something differently for those students — perhaps start with active ‘inclusion’ techniques that develop a sense of comfort and well-being for the child.

Many teachers choose to stick to tried and tested methods that have worked for them, but, unfortunately, are a thing of the past, such as teacher-led explanations and note-taking. Hundreds of schools still follow this strategy in a bid to ‘cover’ the syllabus. If they were to venture into lea­rning more effic­i­e­­nt ways of student-centred teaching, they would find it works so much better in our world of massive ‘transition’.

Not only do the students benefit from upgraded te­­aching methods, teachers themselves would find it gratifying and motivating. There are virtual conferences, webinars and massive open online courses that can enable teachers to bring technology into the classrooms.

According to a McKinsey 2023 report, The Skills Revolution and the Future of Earning and Learning’, a skills-first approach transforming the learning paradigm is critical for the students’ readiness for the 21st century. The same report states that “high-performing teachers can raise the performance of students by 53 percentage points in PISA scores, on average, over that of similar students with low-performing teachers”.

Given the critical role of teachers, keeping up with technological changes and focusing on upgrading skills can yield lifelong returns for students and teachers.

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*Published in Dawn, May 6th, 2024*