**Rethinking teacher hiring and development**

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Learning outcomes in schools in Pakistan continue to lag despite significant strides made in access to schooling, improvement in availability of resources, and widespread recognition among people that education is potentially transformative. This lag is not for the lack of effort, though; the educational landscape in Pakistan in general and the public schooling system has been buzzing with reform efforts since the turn of the 21st century.

The sluggish or inefficacious translation of reforms into learning outcomes for students warrants a critical analysis of the efforts. A scrutiny of educational reforms reveals the fact that our teacher hiring and development practices are frozen in time. Archaic methods of staffing, motivating, and professional development are the Achilles’ heel of our public sector education.

Affecting learning outcomes for students is the holy grail of schooling at any level. There is no second opinion over this. It is, however, more so in early education as it is doubly challenging to create an atmosphere that is propitious for learning among younger children. The importance of good teaching in the early years of schooling, however, cannot be overstated. Good quality teaching at the primary level is quintessential not only for catalysing the intellectual development of children but for development of their social behaviours.

[Opposition claims victory as govt postpones joint Parliament sitting](https://nation.com.pk/11-Nov-2021/opposition-claims-victory-as-govt-postpones-joint-parliament-sitting)

Children who perform reasonably well in the early stages of schooling are generally less likely to drop out, more likely to go into higher education, and more likely to participate in the labour market. In the global south, the prevalence of illiteracy, poverty, and inequality have a drag on the learning of children—which then spirals into dropouts or too sluggish or little learning to be useful—but it is the teachers who become the bulwark of ‘no child left behind’.

It is they who engineer the bridges that mitigate the negative impact of the children’s backgrounds on learning. They aren’t called national builders for no reason. It is thus critical to make sure schools, particularly public schools, which cater to most of our population, are staffed with people with the requisite technical repertoire and behavioural traits.

There is a nearly unanimous approach to hiring and development of teachers all over Pakistan despite provinces being autonomous to design their own policies. Broadly speaking, all provinces hire teachers using a composite score based on academic qualification and competence, a preliminary test, and a panel interview. Once hired, teachers undergo a capacity development programme, part of which is an initial training for a certain period and part of it is ongoing professional development.

[French police arrest PSG women's player Diallo after attack on teammate](https://nation.com.pk/11-Nov-2021/french-police-arrest-psg-women-s-player-diallo-after-attack-on-teammate)

The flaws in this model are countless and conspicuous and are reflected in the abysmal performance of our schools. This model attracts all sorts of unwanted applicants, ranging from those who are looking for a side hustle for some time until a more rewarding job comes through, those who are not even remotely interested in teaching but can’t land any other job due to limited opportunities and those who barely meet the requirements but get in by cracking the test and interview patterns or by exploiting the quotas.

Such individuals, when appointed, are not keen in developing their capacities as it is but either a transient phase or a permanent calling which they preposterously believe requires little time, skills, or efforts. With interests that do not align with those of the schools or children, the training such teachers receive post appointment do very little to improve their pedagogical skills or motivation.

This is not to say that the method of hiring does not attract or capture competent, motivated individuals. It certainly does so, but not with a reasonable consistency and precision. The cost of missing the mark while hiring teachers is too prohibitive—one needs not look further than the stats on dropouts, out-of-school children, and content mastery in government schools in Pakistan. These are manifestations of, among other things, exposure to ineffective teaching. Despite its conspicuous shortcomings, this model for hiring and developing teaching staff continues to be in practice only because it is convenient.

[CM Buzdar directs divisional, district committees to improve law and order situation](https://nation.com.pk/11-Nov-2021/cm-buzdar-directs-divisional-district-committees-to-improve-law-and-order-situation)

Researchers and policymakers are increasingly calling for alternate models of hiring and developing teachers to enhance teacher effectiveness. Based on evidence from the literature on teacher effectiveness, they call for focusing on hiring the people with the right repertoire, behavioural traits, motivation, and value sets. Such alternate models look for people who are already better positioned to teach effectively rather than hiring people with general cognitive abilities and trying to turn them into effective teachers.

At first this sounds like a lot of work, but if one accounts for the time and resources that are spent on teacher training programmes post appointment in the existing model, the volume of work in the alternate model is dwarfed. With the same level of effort or even lesser, we can hire better and more prepared teachers who would hit the ground running. Our provincial governments shall therefore do away with the practices that are frozen in time and begin working towards a new, more effective one.

[Myanmar reports 1,180 new COVID-19 cases, 14 more deaths](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2021/myanmar-reports-1-180-new-covid-19-cases-14-more-deaths)

A comprehensive alternate model would exploit forward and backward linkages (with universities that offer degrees in education), assessments of socio-emotional and pedagogical competencies, and indicators of predilection towards the profession of teaching to hire the right cohort of people and task them with educating the future generations.

Education authorities could sit down with universities that offer degrees in education and pedagogy and co-create the standards. These should necessarily include hands-on skills development in teaching and exposure to the school atmosphere. This shall be complemented by prioritising candidates who opt for such competitive degrees in education.

The education authorities shall spend adequate time vetting the applicants to be sure they are properly assessed in the domains of socioemotional skills, resilience, management, and pedagogy. The system of quotas shall be done away with so that only those highly competent and motivated to teach shall be inducted. Resources shall be allocated to capacity development of departments so that all these steps are followed with absolute precision.

[OIC special envoy for J&K, Assistant Secretary General visits Chirikot sector of LOC](https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2021/oic-special-envoy-for-j-k-assistant-secretary-general-visits-chirikot-sector-of-loc)

Since this model considers both pedagogical and socio-psychological skills of applicants and draws from a pool of candidates who already signal their motivation by opting for highly enriching academic training in undergraduate or graduate education in education, this will filter out applicants who are not fit for teaching.

Switching to this model will need a change of values, incurring hefty initial investment, and a great deal of unlearning by many stakeholders. It will draw resistance and criticism. It will not be easy. But eventually it will provide us with teachers who will have the much needed technical and socio-psychological skills to persevere and deliver on their single great responsibility: learning among students. The best way out of a difficulty, as they say, is through it—not around it.