[**Teacher engagement**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1692046/teacher-engagement)

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WE often talk about engaging students, enabling them to become lifelong learners and helping them improve academically. We focus much less on faculty engagement in schools and colleges. As a result, the insight into their motivation and performance is generally lacking when formulating education policy and goals.

Engagement from educational leadership alone cannot sweep our floors clean. In fact, each role at every level requires leadership for collective change. Teachers are not only instructors, they are nurturers, enablers and investors in intellectual capital. In educational institutions, they are the gatekeepers of quality, with access to student’ realities and a first-hand view of their progress. The quality of education entails far more than getting a degree or certificate. Quality assurance in schools and colleges is contingent upon strategic public investment in opportunity, resources and building teacher capacity which requires continuous professional dev­e­lo­pment to upgrade skills and methods. The value of teachers does not only come from helping students attain academic targets but being enabled to drive institutional goals.

Factors plaguing our school system in past decades include the high teacher turnover when young faculty, especially women, change jobs, drop out of the workforce after marriage or decide to be stay-at-home mothers. Older, more experienced faculty tend to resort to deeply ingrained, traditional methods. Those that have PhDs take up contingent or tenured positions at higher education institutes, where faculty engagement is not necessarily more pronounced.

Most higher education institutes do not have built-in mechanisms to incentivise engagement beyond the necessary academic attainment goals. Public policy measures must pay close attention to teachers who complain about being overworked and underpaid, especially those who stick with the job, are open to evolving, and display strong work ethics and commitment. They are the ones who are an integral part of the solution to our education crisis.

Motivated teachers find ways of improving their skills.

Most teachers who are motivated and open to professional development opportunities find ad hoc ways of improving their skills. A structured, ongoing approach involving reflection, assessments and action plans would lead to implementation and impact. One hopes the soon-to-be-appointed HEC chairperson will prioritise training programmes that can potentially transform universities from ghost towns to thriving centres of teaching and learning.

A commitment to updating the syllabus and upgrading the teachers’ skills carries a world of promise when we look at the statistics of university-going youth in Pakistan. Student enrolment in degree colleges and universities is almost five million and growing at an average rate of six per cent. As the government pledges to fulfil the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals — particularly SDG 4 — by 2030, addressing the gap between enrolment and engagement may be crucial and the faculty can provide the necessary bridge.

Our public expenditure on education is one of the lowest in the world, just above 3pc of GDP. When we look at teacher engagement strategies that have changed the face of higher education globally, there is a common thread. At the heart of teacher engagement lies impactful professional development, having a deep insight into the strategic priorities of the institution and being able to engage teachers in developing a relevant skillset to empower students for real-world solutions. Teachers also need to be able to engage in self-regulation, monitoring and reporting progress independently.

Two-way communication between management and faculty helps the faculty become a part of the evolution of strategic aims. Innovation in teaching and learning comes from collaborative methods that are used effectively to cater to the context and requirements of long-term goals. This also implies we will have to discard the frameworks that are not working, re-evaluate the commitment of faculty members, and hire for competence and potential those with an eye on the ball — those working not just towards their own professional success but also the growth of the institution.

As Steve Jobs said, “We hire smart people, so they can tell us what to do.” Micromanagement and constant surveillance is a thing of the past, especially in the current hybrid working culture where competence and commitment are judged by productivity and outcomes, and not the number of hours clocked at the workplace. This new modus operandi requires in-house learning management systems that can speed up learning for both students and faculty. Those with half-baked commitment get weeded out in a demanding work environment where course completion is only a part of the job, and not the same as student attainment.

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