[**Teaching licences**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1758912/teaching-licences)

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AT one level, a teaching licence is for teachers and their professionalisation. At another, deeper level, it is for the students. It shows that a society cares for the realisation of its future generations’ potential. Both elements, professionalisation of teachers and care for children, were reaffirmed by the Sindh government when on May 25, 2023, it approved a teaching licence policy.

Accordingly, teachers will be able to obtain licences endorsing they have the required qualification, competence, and attitude to be made responsible for the intellectual, moral and emotional development of children. The candidates will have to pass a test and renew the licence every five years. The licence is initially intended for teachers who will be recruited in future. It is not compulsory for existing government or private school teachers at the moment, although they can apply for it if they wish to.

The word ‘licence’ has Latin roots, ‘licentia’, whose meanings can range from freedom to act to deviating from the permitted or even being unruly. Here, with the teaching licence, we are concerned mainly with the first meaning, ie, freedom or permission to act.

Many practices require a licence — for example, to drive, to carry arms, to practice medicine, to give financial advice and to construct buildings. A moment’s reflection will show that these practices involve a relationship of power, and their negative use can harm the vulnerable. One carrying arms or driving a car has disproportionate power over those without arms or without a vehicle. A doctor with her knowledge of body and medicine, has power over the patient who comes to her in a state of vulnerability. She has the power to cure or kill. There is potential danger that these resources can harm the vulnerable if possessed by an unsuitable doctor. There is an interplay of power, duty to care and vulnerability in all these areas of life.

A teacher can enhance or demolish a child’s potential.

Teaching too involves a relationship of power. A teacher usually is more knowledgeable and both physically and psychologically stronger than the children who are impressionable, comparatively weak and trusting. A teacher can enhance or demolish the natural competencies of a child; empower or scare the kid for life; and contribute to autonomy or indoctrination of the mind. The child is vulnerable, the teacher is powerful. Shouldn’t we require this teacher to possess credentials, skills and attitudes that nurture, rather than harm, children?

The teacher is responsible not only for the physical care of her students but also for their cognitive and emotional development. Each child is unique, with a different style and pace of learning, as well as varied emotional and other needs. To be able to respond to these diverse needs and nurture them is not an easy responsibility. Some teachers are gifted but most have to learn to address them effectively.

Teachers require a command over the subject matter, ways of translating ideas for different age levels, mastery over assessment, ability to manage classrooms and the capacity to offer counselling. Increasingly, they are expected to look after the mental health of children and develop them into active citizens.

Teaching is an art and a science. A teaching licence, if rightfully awarded, can ensure that a teacher entrusted with the care of our children has the necessary skills and knowledge. In our context, it is even more important as teachers are not necessarily required to undergo professional development before joining the profession. Hence, a teaching licence is also a call to professionalise teaching, and create minimum standards of knowledge and practice.

A licence, in the final analysis, is about the duty of caring — of the powerful towards the vulnerable. So, a licence awarded to teachers, is actually for the care of the students. It is said that when a flower doesn’t bloom, we fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower. If our children are not blooming educationally, we need to fix the educational environment; having teaching licences is part of this attempt. The possession of a licence by a teacher can satisfy a parent that her child is in caring hands. Imagine the collective effect of this towards society as a whole.

The other day, we compared two adverts, one for a driver and the other for a teacher. The requirements for the driver were extensive, requiring knowledge, experience, certain personality traits and a licence. For the teacher, the requirement was minimal, some experience, and a willingness to work at a salary which was barely above the minimum wage. It seemed that we care more for our cars than our children. The teaching licence may change that.

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*Published in Dawn, June 10th, 2023*