

Motivating School Teachers in Afghanistan: Methodology

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Abstract

Teaching as a profession has gained nobility and respect for its service to society. The application, dedication and selfless devotion of school teachers in Afghanistan to their line of work has received accolades from all quarters. Even so, it is an undeniable fact that the tedious and repetitious everyday classroom activity, lack of positive initiatives from the government and low salaries are responsible for the adverse impact on teacher's mental health, decreasing job satisfaction levels, burnout and a major cause for their regular absenteeism. Additionally, stress due to immense workpressure affects their performance in the classroom and raises doubts about their professionalism. This also impacts the enthusiasm and interest of the students in a negative manner. It is, therefore, an immensely important issue that needs to be addressed by taking a holistic approach by analysing the cause and effect of the various factors that lead to teacher's feeling uninspired and demotivated, be it professional or personal. It is the need of the hour to chart out programs that get educators - primary to high school - acquainted with modern pedagogies through proper training and get them enthused with policies that keep their flame of motivation burning.

Keywords: Teachers, school, Motivation, Interest, stress, Job satisfaction.

Introduction

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2013/14 on Afghanistan, 'Prospective teachers should ideally enter teacher education programs knowing enough about the subjects they will teach. In some income countries, however, teachers often enter the profession lacking core subject knowledge because their education has been poor.' This accurate observation sums up the quality of teachers hired in Afghanistan who has not received any professional training and are not seasoned in the subjects they teach. It wouldn't be the right assessment to put the entire blame on teachers, for the weak education system of Afghanistan needs a complete overhaul. Until then, teachers have to be trained to be confident in their profession, and their needs and difficulties need to be addressed to make them motivated and enthused. The multiple causes for lack of inspiration among teachers need to be understood from a broader perspective to find holistic solutions as the future of the students is at stake. As teaching is considered a noble profession, its sanctity can only be preserved if the teachers are content with their needs being met.

A school can be the most rewarding and exciting workplace if teachers are granted the liberty to select the methodology, they deem fit in a class to teach a particular subject. Nothing motivates teachers more than students grasping a subject in quick time. The strict guidelines issued by schools in Afghanistan to follow a set pattern of method in classroom teaching hinders the creativity of the teacher, which causes boredom for the students and the educators. The uninspiring environment where the voices of teachers go unheard, basic facilities go unprovided, and the presence of poor infrastructure makes teaching arduous, makes teachers feel unworthy and shows a lack of respect for the profession. It is under these strenuous circumstances that teachers should be motivated.

Afghanistan has yet to fully recognise teaching as an occupation that builds the future of a population and a nation. The country's youth usually avoid taking up teaching as a career due to the low salaries that are offered. Educators need to be given a platform to air their grievances, and prompt action should be taken by the education ministry to resolve them. Also, there are other steps that can be taken to motivate them at the primary level.

The Fundamentals of Teacher Motivation

To be innately motivated is a positive characteristic that can prove to be immensely effective if “Teacher motivation is characterised by showing how each system evolves from specific teacher goal orientations” Ames, C., & Ames,

R. (1984). Students are the focus of a schooling system,. The betterment of pupils is not possible or effective without teacher’s playing an important part in it and becoming the constituent and beneficiary of the system. The objectives of the teachers should become a part of the aims of the education department as it will serve a dual purpose of teacher’s feeling valued and will make them a party in the process of modernising education. Educators in Afghanistan need to be taken into confidence by regular communication, their opinions need to be counted and implemented, and their work appreciated and rewarded. Fox (1961) listed four frequently nominated reasons for motivation in educators: a desire to work with children or adolescents, impart knowledge, the opportunity to continue one’s own education and service to society. Extrinsic and Intrinsic factors of motivation spur the teachers to give their ultimate effort to the school and their profession. To understand and provide for the basic needs of teachers and to ensure their participation in courses and workshops that hone their skills and introduce them to the latest pedagogies would encourage them to implement new methodologies in the classroom, which would offer them the liberty to experiment.

The Synergy of Motivation

The parts of the sum to inspire Afghanistan teachers to include an array of significant measures that need to be implemented upon gaining insights into the causes of demotivation and resolve them. Currently, the remuneration of teachers is abysmally low with no perks. The teaching profession attracts individuals who are either compelled to take it up due to dire financial circumstances or persons who are killing time looking for lucrative jobs. Money is a great source of motivation, and the priority of the government should be to make handsome salary increments as “salaries, and working conditions can be helpful in attracting, developing and retaining skilled and effective teachers” (Arain et al., 2014). Other than that, the basic infrastructure at schools needs to be either provided or upgraded. Emphasis should be laid on providing urban and rural schools with materials and equipment that can aid the educators in making teaching interesting and appealing to the learners.

The teacher-student ratio is another concern for teacher motivation as classrooms are overcrowded and deny the teacher to know the learning abilities of each child as the “teachers’ motivational strategies also can be affected by ‘factors from below’ referring to the particular characteristics of their classroom population” (Hornstra, L., Mansfield, C., van der Veen, I. et al. 2015). The use of technology in classrooms is another area that needs a special mention as teacher’s find it an arduous task to physically demonstrate and explain complex subject matter, which leads to wastage of time and results in student interest waning quickly. Additionally, “the emphasise that even with, or especially with, technology, schools must work on the interpersonal things that happen in schools” (Ball and Skrzypek, 2019). Lack of coordination between the administration and teachers and a delay in making decisions on teacher suggestions are vital factors contributing to teacher demotivation.

The Catalysts of Motivation in Teachers

As the yardsticks of teacher motivation of progressive countries cannot be applied for Afghanistan, the

methods used to motivate teachers to have to be in the context of the unique and towering challenges educators have to experience. The physical security of schools should be effectively strengthened, as they have been victims, especially girls' schools, of terror attacks as "Members of Taliban groups operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan have also openly declared their opposition to the education of girls and have used violent attacks against girls, their families and teachers as a means of asserting their control over local communities" (UNESCO, Education Under Attack, UNESCO (Paris), 2010).

Educators need to be provided with professional training through pedagogy experts to enhance their teaching skills and their performance assessed and rewarded for a healthy competition between teachers. This exercise would encourage varied methodologies for various subjects, which would ultimately make classroom learning engrossing for students and teachers. The salaries of teachers should be raised steeply as money is the prime motivator for excellence in performance. As teachers in Afghanistan consider teaching as a transit job before landing well-paid employment, it becomes necessary to offer a respectable remuneration to retain them as "both high- and low-income countries around the world face issues in both attracting and retaining quality teachers, due largely to poor motivation and incentive structures" (Crehan, 2016; Han and Yin, 2016; UNESCO IICBA, 2017). The other important factors include: providing educators with lower size classrooms to avoid teacher burnout, more prep periods, and greater responsibilities with autonomy in the classroom. A reduction of workloads to avoid burnout and giving credence to their opinions will motivate teachers exponentially.

Conclusion

Educators in Afghanistan are working against all odds to build the future of Afghanistan through their students. Their motivation levels need to be at their peak, and that can only happen after making them feel valued and respected through various steps taken to find a solution to their problems. It is the primal duty of the government to take a proactive approach in raising the salaries of educators for a better quality of life and provide them with modern classroom facilities and develop their talent and skills through regular holistic training and development programs. Teachers need to be encouraged by allowing them to explore their methodology and not be restricted by the limitations of the curriculum. Stress and an overbearing workload in overcrowded classrooms with the lack of basic infrastructure are common factors of demotivation. But more importantly, it is the anguish caused by the apathy and lackadaisical approach of the powers that be towards their demands is unnerving. Extrinsic motivation, sometimes, fuels intrinsic motivation. And that can be done by taking concrete steps by rewarding educators for their performance and contribution towards pedagogical discoveries. Teachers in Afghanistan are already doing a commendable job by keeping the torch of education brightly burning in adverse conditions. The time is now ripe to honour them with what they rightly deserve - an environment that nurtures their love for teaching.

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