

Building Better Teachers For The Future

Nadeem Khan | 11th Feb 2025



A representational image showing a female student in a lab. — British Council website/File

History has shown that education, particularly the presence of quality teachers, plays a crucial role in national progress.

The US response to the Sputnik crisis in 1957 highlights how strategic investments in education can drive scientific and technological advancements. By prioritising Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, the U.S. strengthened its global leadership in innovation.

Finland's post-cold war education reforms, which emphasised teacher quality, equity and creativity, transformed the country's education system into one of the world's best. These examples demonstrate that well-trained educators and a strong education system are key drivers of national development and global competitiveness.

In Pakistan, the 18th Amendment to the constitution granted autonomy to the provinces, making health and education provincial subjects along with other domains. Following the devolution of power and the 7th NFC Award, provinces made significant efforts to improve the education sector. All four provinces introduced various education-sector plans, implementing substantial reforms and strategic initiatives to enhance the quality and accessibility of education.

The respective provincial ministries recognise the crucial role of teachers, particularly in the school education system, and have taken numerous steps to enhance their capacity. In addition to these efforts, they have also recruited qualified and competent teachers to improve the overall quality of education.

A teaching licence is an effective way to improve teacher quality and enhance classroom instruction. It sets a minimum standard for hiring, ensuring professionalism and making teaching a more appealing career. Many countries use licensing systems to ensure that only qualified and dedicated teachers enter the profession.

Many countries have established teaching licensing requirements to ensure high educational standards and professional competency among teachers. In the US, teachers must obtain state-specific certification, which typically includes a bachelor's degree, a teacher preparation programme, and passing standardised exams like Praxis.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, educators must achieve Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) by completing an accredited Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programme. Finland sets even higher standards, requiring teachers to hold a master's degree in education and undergo rigorous training. Canada follows a province-specific certification system that mandates a bachelor's degree in education and supervised teaching experience. Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE) oversees teacher training to ensure that only certified professionals enter the field.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), teachers must pass the Teacher Licensing System (TLS) exams to qualify for teaching positions. Likewise, Japan requires aspiring teachers to complete a recognised university programme and pass both national and local certification exams. These licensing systems help maintain teaching quality and ensure that educators meet professional and academic standards before entering the classroom.

In Pakistan, the province of Sindh took the initiative to raise teacher quality and improve teaching in classrooms through an effective system of teaching licensure. This had the potential to enhance the professionalism of teachers by establishing a minimum benchmark for hiring, which, in turn, made teaching a more attractive profession.

The Sukkur IBA Testing Services announced the results of the Teaching License Test, conducted on January 28, 2024, under the approved Sindh Teaching License Policy 2023. A total of 4,000 teachers, holding BEd, MEd, or MA qualifications from both the public and private sectors, participated in the test. Out of these, 646 successfully passed and were awarded an Elementary (Class 1-8) Teaching License.

Although the number of candidates passing was quite low, it was an excellent and bold initiative by the education minister. We should also

commend the teachers who had the courage to participate in the first-ever teaching licence qualifying test.

The licence has three categories: primary, elementary and secondary, based on specific qualifications and experience. In-service teachers need additional experience to qualify for each category. The licence is valid for five years and can be renewed with evidence of continuous professional development (CPD) and payment of a renewal fee. The licence will eventually expand to the private sector and be implemented in phases.

The Teaching License Test assesses professional standards and includes knowledge and pedagogical skills. It is developed by a third-party organization, aligned with the teacher education curriculum. Applicants can retake the test after 6 months or on the next available date. Innovative assessment methods may be introduced in the future. Fees for the test and renewal will be set by STEDA. Private-sector teachers can also apply for the license.

This initiative should be extended all over Pakistan and specifically at higher education for quality and professional teachers. Before implementing the teaching license system, authorities should address several key considerations. First, the licensing process should ensure quality assurance, guaranteeing that teachers meet high educational and ethical standards, which will ultimately improve student outcomes. Professional development is also essential, with continuous training and re-certification to keep teachers up to date on new teaching methodologies.

While standardisation is important for maintaining uniform quality, it must be balanced with flexibility to avoid limiting entry into the profession and potentially causing teacher shortages. Authorities should also consider alternative pathways for professionals

transitioning into teaching from other careers, expanding the pool of qualified candidates.

Lastly, implementation challenges, particularly in developing countries, should be addressed, as financial and administrative constraints may hinder the smooth rollout of licensing systems.

In Pakistan, 43.7 per cent of educational institutions are in the private sector, with nearly 25 million out of 55 million children enrolled in these schools. While a few private schools are performing exceptionally well and following the necessary steps to recruit qualified teachers, there is a clear need for a standardised hiring process aligned with the nation's growth plan. This approach would be similar to the strategies implemented by the US and Finland during the cold war and post-cold war eras to foster educational development.

Teaching licensure is one of the most effective and efficient mechanisms for improving teacher quality and raising the standard of school education, which is crucial in today's competitive, digital and innovative world. However, the process should be introduced gradually to avoid resistance from various segments of the education sector.

A good education can change anyone, but a great teacher can change everything. For it's not just about imparting knowledge, but about inspiring minds, nurturing hearts, and shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

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