

# The Ordeals of Teachers

By John J Kennedy: 12 March 2024

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam noted that three members could make a country corruption-free and fill it with beautiful minds: the father, the mother, and the teacher. One could extend the association of corruption beyond the financial realm to encompass the social, political, cultural, and spiritual spheres. The teacher plays a vital role in shaping such an ecosystem. A nation that fails to honour its teachers cannot progress. This is why education is the foremost priority in developed countries.

Teaching is central to moulding socially responsible and conscientious future leaders. Many educators recognise this and strive to fulfil their academic and social responsibilities. Nevertheless, the landscape of student-teacher relations is undeniably tilting toward a transactional approach. For a truly transformative educational experience, a shift beyond this transactional mindset is imperative. This necessitates a collective effort from all the stakeholders to infuse joy and meaning into the educational journey. The numerous challenges teachers face that often demotivate them must be recognised and addressed. Without such endeavours, the engagement becomes perfunctory and mechanical.

- 1. Classroom size:** The prevalence of large classrooms, particularly in tertiary institutions, obstructs meaningful engagement and restricts the utilisation of effective pedagogical tools for transformative education. In such an environment, implementing a learner-centric approach becomes practically impossible. Despite teachers' awareness of tools designed to address multiple intelligences among students, implementation is impossible due to the overwhelming number of students.
- 2. Challenges of technology:** Adapting to swiftly advancing technology poses another challenge. Sometimes, resistance to change also hampers growth. Grappling with Artificial Intelligence's pervasive influence, especially its unethical use impacting academic integrity, is another primary concern for teachers.
- 3. Parental ownership is crucial:** Navigating parental dynamics introduces another layer of complexity. Many parents focus solely on financial support and neglect essential emotional support during the tertiary stage. These responsibilities are often conveniently shifted onto teachers.
- 4. Administrators' expectations:** While teachers play a vital role in education, they alone cannot guarantee excellence. The management's responsibility to foster a conducive and supportive environment is paramount for institutional success.
- 5. External Pressure:** Teachers in higher education increasingly face heightened pressure due to the paperwork required to comply with the regulatory bodies. While accreditation offers benefits, the teaching community bears the brunt of this process. Additionally, government agencies frequently assign teachers to non-

academic duties such as census and election work, further impeding their academic engagement in a country where elections are perennial.

- 6. Classroom Management:** The challenge of large classes is compounded by issues related to students' indiscipline and indifferent attitudes- a problem that has intensified post-Covid. Lack of interest, irregular attendance, tardiness, mobile phone distractions, and the use of mental health as an excuse have become more pervasive. Teachers spend more time managing behavioural issues than teaching.

In short, teaching has become incredibly challenging, and the widespread tension often leads to burnout. Today's teachers are navigating a tightrope, fully aware of consequences of missteps. They want quick and tangible remedial measures to realise Kala's dream and help teachers deliver justice to their profession.

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