

# Actively Engaging Students at School

Classic lecturing, working through books, studying by heart – the professors Mokamel and Zaki built their lessons at the Teacher Training Centre in the provinces Samangan and Takhar on these teaching methods.

Mokamel has been a teacher for six years. Throughout his professional career, he was facing the same problem over and over again: “I never managed to deliver my syllabus in teaching units of 50 minutes. I didn’t even know how to design a realistic teaching schedule. I constantly fell behind with my course content. It was very unsatisfying.” Zaki, who has been teaching for eight years, adds: “We get these really thick books which we have to work through with the students until the end of the school year. With our conventional teaching methods, this was simply impossible.”

A four-week course at the Teacher Training Centre in Mazar-e Sharif which they attended together with 38 other colleagues from Balkh, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar and Samangan provinces opened Zaki and Mokamel’s eyes. The German and Swiss governments financed and designed the course.

In contrast to what they were used to, the participants did not just listen to what a lecturer told them. On the contrary, they had to participate, get involved and become proactive.

The first week’s programme focused on different teaching methods, as well as learning and education theory. The second week, the teacher trainers put their newly gained theoretical knowledge into practice when participating in role-plays. This was an enlightening moment for Zaki: “I realised that, even though there is a lot of information in textbooks, books alone don’t encourage students to teach themselves or to conduct research independently. During the role-play, we went to the library and the internet and acquired a large part of the teaching content this way – without the teacher having to interfere.” For Zaki, this was a great experience: “Now, I know how my students can process content in a short time. After finishing their training to become a teacher, they can apply these methods with their own students.”

Instead of teacher-centred learning, Afghanistan’s teachers ought to design their lessons student-centred. Now Mokamel knows how to prepare for the 50 minute classes: “I now know how to teach a lesson that will be understood by my students, future teachers themselves. This is a huge relief.”

During the four-week training, course participants tested their new findings repeatedly at first hand. The possibilities of involving students are



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numerous, in both art and natural science subjects. “The German government built many schools and equipped them with laboratories,” Mokamel reports. “Now we know how to engage students to make full use of these labs. Teachers must provide their students with the theoretical knowledge behind the experiments. This will deepen the students’ knowledge.”

The prospective teachers at the Teacher Training Centre of the northern Afghan provinces benefit from the enhanced skills of their teachers. As Gulbashra, a student at the centre, who wants to teach social sciences after finishing her education, tells us, “The new programme for teaching methods is really exciting. Everyone has to be active and take on different roles. Last time, I was the principal and had to manage my teaching staff and the school. I learnt a lot.”

One of Gulbashra’s friends hesitated to participate in the programme at first. However, Gulbashra was so enthusiastic that she talked her into it. “My friend is very insecure and has family issues. This programme helps her enormously to develop self-esteem. By practicing role-plays, we realise what we know, and realise what we still need to learn. This was exactly what my friend needed,” the young woman tells us, beaming.

Thanks to continuing training of Teacher Training Centre lecturers, education of teachers in Afghanistan is undergoing change. Slowly, participative and student-centred education finds its way into everyday life in Afghan schools. This results in higher quality of education and better prospects for the schoolchildren’s future.

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