

TEACHING AT SCHOOL

PART 1

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From the series:
Teaching at School



AL HIDAAYAH

الهداية

The Guidance for Humanity

Based on the Glorious Qur'an and Authentic Hadith

STUDY GUIDE



COURSE OUTLINE

Course Topics

1. Are our schools improving?
2. Important first steps towards betterment of our schools
3. Focus on the Hereafter or aim for the best of both the worlds?
4. Requisites of a good vision
5. Holding yourself accountable
6. How to check the progress of learning in our schools?
7. What is good teaching – How can you be a good teacher?
8. What is meant by three-way questions?
9. Planning the class and curriculum
10. Planning the lesson – a teacher's homework
11. How can one improve their lesson?
12. Use of audio/visual techniques
13. Developing research skills
14. Use of technology (smartboards)

Course Objectives

1. Assessing the current levels of our schools
2. Learning new ways to improve our teaching
3. Understanding how to improve the curriculum and deal with standard study materials
4. Understanding the needs of students and adapting accordingly



COURSE OUTLINE

Question & Answer Bucket

Transcripts

Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions

Match the columns

True or False

Course Duration

Video	- 2 hours 20 min
Study Guide	- 45 min
Assessment	- 10 min
Total Duration	- 3 hours 15 min

LESSON 1



**OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?**

PART 1



1

ARE OUR SCHOOLS IMPROVING?

We need to keep watch on what developments are happening in other schools around the world to judge ourselves, if we are improving or are we at the same level that we were. It is of importance to everyone – the principals, teachers, parents, and even the students should participate.

We see constant improvements and advancements happening in different fields, but we don't focus our attention on what are the developments that could happen or that are happening in schools, in the methods of teaching and the curriculum.





2

IMPORTANT FIRST STEPS TOWARDS BETTERMENT OF OUR SCHOOLS

i Schools should be ‘student-centred’

Amongst the first steps of bringing about a change and improvement in our schools is that they should be ‘student-centred’.

When we reflect upon teaching or education, the core of any school, are its students. It's not the teachers, or the administration.

Schools were made because of the needs of children, to make sure they have adequate facilities and good teachers to help them focus on their studies and gain knowledge.

In the past, when we used to visit schools, our main focus was the teacher, what is the teacher doing? How well is the teacher able to explain the concept to the students? But the new trend is all about focusing on what the students do. Are they able to understand what they are being taught? Thus, there should be a shift in focus, from a ‘teacher-centred’ focus to ‘student-centred’ focus.





Understanding the importance of defining a purpose

Amongst the most important things that a school should have is ‘a clear purpose’, it is the main criteria for which the school or an educational institution has been started.

Today's educational scenario is that our education is more focused on careers and grades, but we should realise that education is not merely for grades and careers, it should be beyond that.

It is important to remember that the purpose and vision you have for your school, is like a promise to the parents. You are promising the parents that when their children graduate, they will be able to do so and so, and at the end of their schooling, the parent will have the right to hold you responsible if their children study in your school, and you have not fulfilled the vision you had set.

It is also important to understand that one needs to reword the vision from time to time, because a vision is not something that is stable all the time. Sometimes you may need to change the wording according to the times and what the situation demands.



3



FOCUS ON THE HEREAFTER OR AIM FOR THE BEST OF BOTH THE WORLDS?



“Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good.”

Al Qur’an 2:201

What would your reaction be if somebody tells you that the Qur’an also reverses the focus and asks us to focus more on the hereafter?



“Seek through that which Allah has given you, the home of the hereafter; And do not forget the share of this world.”

Al Qur’an 28:77





In short, the Qur'an asks us to keep the Aakhirah as our main focus and not get distracted by this Duniya.

But what we need to realise is that not everyone has the knowledge that you might have or understand it as you understand. We need to explain that as Muslims our main focus should be the Aakhirah, because the life of this world is temporary and will come to an end. It will end no matter what you do, you are not going to delay it. Our goal is to worship Allah (swt) because we want to enter Paradise, and this is why we are here in this world.



LESSON 2



**OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?**

PART 2

4



REQUISITES OF A GOOD VISION



Vision should comprise of both the Aakhirah and Duniya

Because we are different from the others, our primary focus should be the Aakhirah. We need to show that to the people and to other schools.

But how would you explain that to a parent who asks you, “How are you preparing our children to reach Paradise safely?”

Before we answer this question one must also keep in mind that most parents do not want to sacrifice the Duniya for the Aakhirah. They want success in both the worlds.



The Prophet (pbuh) said:

“Work for your Duniya as you are going to live forever. And you work for Aakhirah as if you're dying tomorrow.”





This is where the balance should be made, and we need to draw the line. It could be 50-50, could be 70-30.

Even though parents want Duniya, we are the leaders. Our job is to lead and not follow what they need. Our goal should not be only to please the parents, but we are trying to guide them to Islam, to guide them to the right path.

Thus, a correct answer for the above question could be:

“Our curriculum is primarily built on the teachings of Islam, and we want our children to be leaders in this world in all aspects of life; science, politics and everything else.”

Such a statement would send a message that we do not support any other ideology other than the ideology of Islam, but also along with that, our focus is also the life of this world. Even though we give importance to the Aakhirah, we do not believe in letting our children be left behind others in this world.





Educators of the next generation

They should be trained to be able to educate and lead the future generations.

For example, when the parents come to a class and see their child is presenting to his classmates, they should get to know that their child has the ability to present and to lead (to lead their classmates, to have some projects in the community around them) otherwise he or she would be helped and trained for it from the early years of his life.





Working as a team and ensuring everyone's progress

Experienced teaching staff having expertise in their respective fields, capable of implementing the vision and handling the respective subjects would give confidence to the parents coming.

There is a difference between informing and giving out information and having the students internalize it. It should be part of their DND (Do Not Disturb).

A good leader is one who shares his vision and works with his team towards fulfilling and achieving it, because a shared vision will help the people to understand it better and make it easier for them to achieve it.



5



HOLDING YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Who should be held responsible if the school does not achieve its promised visions or missions?

The owners or the management or the teachers or the students?

**Should the school leadership be accountable for what it is doing?
Or because they are the owners, they are free to do whatever they want?**

To handle such scenarios, there should be a board that would stop the school and hold it accountable for not fulfilling their vision, or their tasks and duties.





“And stop them, indeed they are to be questioned.”

Al Qur’an 37:24

There should be a board of trustees, a governing body, a board that would stop the school and hold it accountable.

For example, ‘You promised us to train the teachers to be able to implement this curriculum. But since the last 10 months, you didn't make any trainings, or workshops for them!’

They are known as critical friends, they are your friends and your supporters, but they would also reprimand you for your mistakes and shortcomings.

Umar bin Khattab (ra) had hired a person whose main job at the end of the day was to brief him about what he had achieved that day and what are the things that he shouldn't have done or what were his shortcomings.

The board should consist of teachers, strong teachers who can spell out their opinions and are brave enough to tell you, ‘That is not what we expected from you.’, ‘What you're doing is not what you have promised us.’

It could also include parents, students, and someone from the outside to come and supervise the work, to get an unbiased and an honest review.

LESSON 3



OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?

PART 3

6

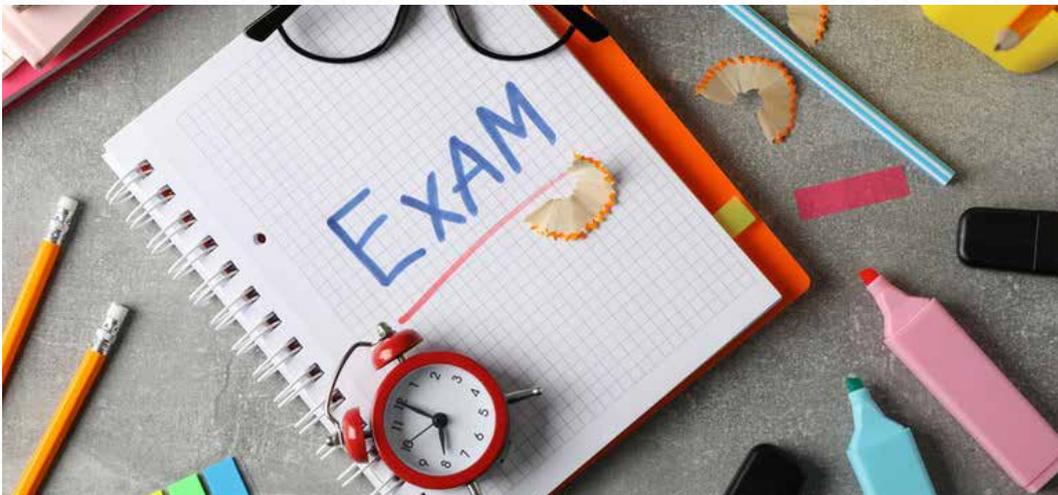


HOW TO CHECK THE PROGRESS OF LEARNING IN OUR SCHOOLS?

How can we know that our students are improving? What are the tools that we could use to know that they are learning?

Some might say that we could measure their progress by conducting exams and tests, but what we might fail to realise is that there is a human side to it, a personal side. We love our children, so we give them an easy exam. The exam results don't really reflect if the students are progressing or not.

Therefore, among the ways by which we measure progress is –





Comparison between institutions (Inter-school competitions)

You cannot know that your students are doing well unless you compare them with others, at least one school beside you having the same curriculum.

There should be one standard exam and mode of testing all the students, because you cannot compare if the exam is different, one of the exams may be easier or weaker than the other, or not comprehensive as the other.

When all the students would take the same exam, you could say that your school is the best, because you would compare the results of your students with the average results all over the world.

If you don't do this comparison, there is no way that one can say that their students are doing well.

As long as there are other schools working, and as long as other countries are working in education, and they are improving the system, we have to push ourselves to be one step ahead or two steps ahead.





ii Having a set of standard expectations

What is the standard? Some people would say the criteria, others would say that they are expectations.

For example, a school designs a course and has set certain expectations for it, say that students by finishing grade six would be able to do these six things.

When you put standards, you can judge your students, whether they come close to these standards or not. You measure them against the standards when they come to your class, or you visit each other.

These standards can be international standards, national or local standards that the school has selected.





Shift of focus – from theory to practise

In the current scenario, most of the examinations measure knowledge and information. This would be very acceptable in the past, but now there is a shift.

There is a shift from focusing 100% on knowledge to practical aspects like concepts and skill. Therefore, there is a need to reformat the brains of the teachers and everybody who works in the educational field, that education is no longer only about focussing 100% on knowledge.

There should be a difference between just giving out knowledge and understanding the concepts and using it in your practical life.





Knowledge is a piece of information that can be learnt by mere repetition, but a concept should be understood. It cannot be learnt without understanding the meaning of it.

As a teacher when you would prepare your lesson, you would know that this is knowledge and these are the concepts, and you need to understand them first, so that when you would explain them to the students, it would be easier to get your point across.

For example, in the Qur'an there is some knowledge, there are some concepts, and there are some skills, like the skill of recitation, the skill of Tajweed.

- **Knowledge is gained by repetition and depends on memory.**
- **Concepts are gained by explanation.**
- **Skills are gained by repetition and practice.**

When you understand the difference, you know that each one of them needs to be tackled in a different way and use a different approach accordingly.

This approach should be seen in our examinations also, we need to redesign our exams because you cannot have a written exam to measure the oral skill of the students.

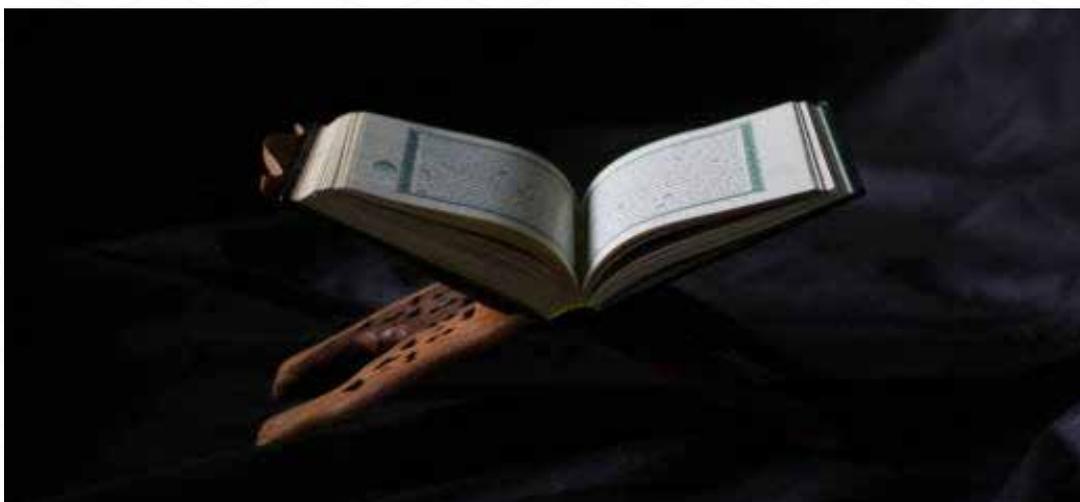


iv **Diagnostic exams**

This form of exam requires from us to know something very important, the starting point.

Any student that enrolls in a school, his or her starting point should be known in order to know whether they're progressing or not. Thus, after six months, or after two years, you can say that our school made this progress. But if the starting point is not known, we will be deceived.

For example, a student joins your school and after five months, he or she memorized 10 Surahs, you're very happy. But you didn't know that when he joined your school he had already memorized 10 Surahs. So, he's not progressing. In fact, he's standing still where he or she was. That is why it's important to have something called **diagnostic exams**.



LESSON 4



OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?

PART 4



7

7. WHAT IS GOOD TEACHING – HOW CAN YOU BE A GOOD TEACHER?

What is good teaching? What do you expect to see in a class that can be classified as a good or an outstanding lesson?

i **Interactive classes / interaction with the teacher**

Benefits of an interactive class depend on the type and quality of interaction and questions.

If we indulge in silly questions, closed types of questions, (have one or two answers, yes or no?), it would be of no benefit.

What makes outstanding students? When you indulge in questions that would motivate you to think critically, something that challenges both of you.

Questions like – What is your opinion about this, or how would you react if this happened? Such questions will make you think and analyse before you can give an answer.





The teachers need to train themselves to ask challenging questions because these are the types of questions that will help you create leaders, thinkers, organizers, etc.

And finally, we should also understand that an interactive class is a class that makes a good combination between closed questions and open-ended questions. It could be 50-50, 20-80, even 5-95, depending on what subject are you doing.

ii

Involvement of all students

The more you involve students, the better the class would be because some teachers would ask questions and take responses from two or three people only.

One might enter such a class and be deceived that it is an interactive class. Yes, this might be an interactive class, but it doesn't cover the majority of the class.

ONE IMPORTANT RULE THAT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED – THE MORE THE TEACHER SPEAKS, THE LESS EFFECTIVE A CLASS WOULD BE.



When you enter a class, we need the students to do most of the job; 80% for the students 20% for the teacher. The less the teacher acts, the better, because we are graduating the students and not the teacher.

We know that the teacher is very knowledgeable, he or she can talk for 200 hours nonstop, but we're not judging the teacher. We care about what the students can do, what the students know and what they understand.

Even though the person who teaches might be a big name, but if he's only giving out knowledge and not interacting and involving his students, then such a person would be called a scholar and not a teacher, because scholars like to sit and disseminate knowledge. On the other hand, teachers don't say, they move around in the class, they involve the students, they make them the centre of attention and give them the chance to voice out the ideas and opinions. They aim to guide them in the right direction and watch how the student proceeds further.



LESSON 5



OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?

PART 5

8



WHAT IS MEANT BY THREE-WAY QUESTIONS?

If we look at question sessions normally, in general they are either one-way or two-way.

For example, in one-way questions, you find all the students in language classes can respond, but they are not able to ask. The reason is because they had never been given an opportunity to ask.

And an example of two-way questions would be, the teacher would ask, and give the students the opportunity to ask questions.



But it isn't enough, the questions should be three ways, a question would be raised, someone would comment on it and say, 'Excuse me, I have a comment here, you're going to a wrong direction.', then another person would respond to it, and the teacher would say, 'I don't think this is all right. We need to look at it from a different perspective'.



The questions should be three-way, with interaction and comments on the question from all the directions that one can imagine.

**THE THREE IS THE MINIMUM, WHICH IS TEACHER
TO STUDENT, STUDENT TO TEACHER,
STUDENT TO STUDENTS.**



9



PLANNING THE CLASS AND CURRICULUM

Many a time, the teachers are burdened with the syllabus and need to complete it in a very limited time.

When we talk about curriculum, most of the teachers make the textbook their masters and whatever the master tells them to do, they do. This is not a sign of a good teacher, a good teacher is the one who is the master of the textbook and not its slave, because in practicality a teacher knows what their students need.



They see the curriculum in action, see what works and what doesn't work, what needs to be reinforced and what needs to be decreased. They know the parts of the textbook that are not challenging enough and can be done by students themselves at home, and that there are some other sections that need the presence of the teacher in the classroom. You have to be smart and engage the student with studying at home, because we don't want to limit their hours of learning, but to extend these hours; encourage them with giving them some easy assignments and projects to work on etc.

10



PLANNING THE LESSON – A TEACHER'S HOMEWORK

We're always focussing about the student's homework, but we don't talk about the homework of the teacher, which is equally important.

There are no excuses for the teachers that they didn't have the time because they should understand the responsibility they have. They play a major role in the educational field and should take the moral responsibility when they come to this profession. They need to learn to manage their time and fulfil their responsibilities.

They must do their homework properly to understand the whole concept, and only then they should go and talk to the child, but if the teachers do not do their homework, they would not be able to handle the period or explain the concept effectively.





If a teacher notices that a certain tactic, or a way of teaching is not working out, they should try to change their tactics, their way of teaching and try to make it work.

For example, apply that to the concept of three-way interaction, the teachers when they do their lesson at home, you can find the teacher sitting in the back relaxing, and the students are on the stage taking the initiative and doing everything. We love to see that, because it is the teacher who made those students do this job. It's not the students who made themselves, they are the product of the teacher's efforts. They've done their part outside the classroom and now they need to take a back seat, direct, and facilitate the lesson and not teach the entire lesson themselves.

That's what is meant by planning the syllabus and the lesson. It's not just about filling in the blanks, but also knowing about how to handle the lesson, making sure to share the knowledge and also making sure that everybody understands the concepts and acquires the necessary skills.





11

HOW CAN ONE IMPROVE THEIR LESSON?

While teaching a lesson, one should ask their students or others present in the lecture, take their advice and opinions on how they would present the lesson differently or make it better?



Add case studies and personal experiences

A good lesson would allow the opportunity for students to share their own experience and the teacher should begin with one or two examples.

We need to try this with the students, encourage them that this stage is not only for the teacher, but for the whole class. Sometimes sit with students, because if the students feel that you are a part of them, this develops their personality and drop the fear barrier between the teacher and the students.





Learning by errors

This is a good technique; you can make some mistakes and ask the students to see whether they were aware of what's going on around them. If they realise that a mistake was committed, you'd know if they're attentive or not.



Make the student handle the class themselves

In every class there are students who cause some problems, such techniques could be used with students who cause some problems.

They should be given some responsibilities and put on the stage. Once they realise that that everybody's looking at them, they will start to cool down. They run the class and you are sitting there, they may think that they are doing something positive, but in fact you are punishing them but in a polite way.

LESSON 6



**OUR SCHOOLS,
ARE THEY MOVING ON?**

PART 6

12



USE OF AUDIO/ VISUAL TECHNIQUES



“Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart all those will be questioned.”

Al Qur’an 17:34

The listening, the seeing and the brain are very important, they are all responsible for what they are doing.

While teaching a foreign language, most of the teachers don't use audio aids, or audio and recorded material (authentic material). Every one of us has his or her own accent, so when the students move from the class to real life and interact with the native speakers, it becomes very difficult for them because they have not gotten used to listen to the native speakers of that language.





One of the most important technique for language teachers and the others should be that they use some recorded material or certain audio or video clips, so that the students would get used to and able to understand the authentic accent of the native speakers.

i Adding pictures to an audio lesson

There's a Chinese proverb that says, "a picture is stronger than a thousand words."

Seeing something is very important, and the combination of listening and seeing is even stronger than either seeing or listening by itself. So, using the combination of seeing pictures while there is something being said is very important.

ii Use of actions and animations

The use of animations takes your presentation or lesson to another level because an animated picture is stronger than a still picture. When you give the child a picture, and you give the child a real thing or a toy, you will find that child wants to interact with the toy because it's moving.

The same concept can be utilised by the teachers too, moving around, using the body language, making use of your hands, your eyes, smiling at them. Using all possible means to be animated, rather than standing in one place like a still picture and explaining.



Interactive options or solutions

Physically interacting with something on a personal level, when you do something by yourself, it becomes easier to learn, understand and remember than just listening, or seeing something.

When you deal with the internet, and you have the options to select this or not or to highlight this or not, all these makes you learn better than if you just listen, or if you just see.

The use of interactive material, the use of the internet, the use of video clips, that you have the options to select this or to skip this is very vital in learning.



13



DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Researching is one of the most important skills that we need in our student as well as our work life. We cannot graduate students who cannot make research, nor can you get on with life on this planet if you don't know how to make research, how to get the answer from Google and the internet.

It's not just the research, but also how quick you can reach the answer. Some people can get an answer after five minutes, some can get it in a minute, while some others take two hours or don't even have an idea about how to get it. So, the more we develop this skill is very important.





For example, you can ask one of the two students to go to the library to make some research about a point that was raised in class, but if the school was having funds and they used them right (you could have an e-library subscription in the class or something similar), then rather than sending students to the library, you or they could search it up in the class itself while the discussion continues, and they could share it with the class right there itself.

Also, when the students do this, not only they are interacting with the material with the text, but they are also doing something else, they are developing their research skills.

And nowadays, it's not just even the internet. Even with your iPhone, you can do the same thing. So, we need to develop, we need to teach our children. I'm not saying every child yes, but at least in higher grades, they can do this. So, these are some of the things that we need to do in our class.



14



USE OF TECHNOLOGY (SMARTBOARDS)

Nowadays, we have the smart boards. They have pre-programmed lesson plans in it, and in addition to that, you can even display your presentations and research through it.

If we compare the impact of using technology on the students in two different classrooms, one is using the smart board and the other classroom is not. What could be some of the differences that you expect to see?

- a The students who have the facility of using the smart board, they are able to do presentations, lessons, their science experiments in animated form, using visuals and colour combinations. The colour combo, the use of colour code is very important. Using different colours, and each colour would identify for something, or specify something, makes it easier to understand and remember.





- b** They are also able to make their own presentations. Students being able to make their own presentations or Power Point presentations is a very important tool to be learnt and used in class. We are preparing them to lead so that they would be able to affect others, and one way of affecting the audience is the use of technology, it's making a good presentation.
- c** Use of audio-visual aids, or the smart board increases the retention span. With the use of smart boards, use of audio-visual techniques has become easier. It also helps the child retains more of whatever you teach and makes it easier to hold their attention for longer periods of time.
- d** Makes it easier for the teacher to teach and helps save time. One rationale of using the technology is that it saves a lot of time. Instead of trying to explain the thing, no matter how good you are in describing things, or how eloquent you are, it cannot be compared to when someone sees a picture.

For example, trying to describe the impact of a tsunami. You spend five minutes trying to find the most expressive words, but the message that pictures or a video clip will give will be stronger than any words.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT MONEY IS NOT EVERYTHING. THERE ARE MANY WAYS THAT ONE CAN GET AUDIO-VISUALS AND TRAIN STUDENTS TO RESEARCH AND INTERACT WITH DIFFERENT REFERENCES.



**QUESTION
& ANSWER**
BUCKET



Q1

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE REQUISITES OF A GOOD VISION FOR THE SCHOOL?

Amongst some of the very important requisites of a good vision are that:

-  It comprises and focusses on both – the Akhirah and the Duniya.
-  It should help prepare our students to be educators for the next generation.
-  It should motivate everyone to work as a team and ensure progress for everyone, and not just focus on one section.



Q2

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPORTANT WAYS BY WHICH ONE CAN MEASURE THEIR SCHOOL'S PROGRESS?

Amongst the few important and easy ways through which one can measure their school's progress is:

- i Having inter school competitions on a local, national, and international levels so that we can make comparisons between different institutions and understand the progress of the students.
- ii Having a set of standard expectations, so that one can judge the progress being made based on those criteria and know how far along you are, and what expectations have been completed.
- iii Have diagnostic exams, so that the starting point of a student is known, and one is not deceived by false progress.



Q3

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS BY WHICH ONE CAN IMPROVE THEIR LESSONS AND MAKE THEM MORE INTERACTIVE?

Amongst the few important and easy ways through which one can improve their lessons are:

- i** Adding case studies and personal experiences gives the lesson a personal touch. Looking at different case studies and knowing about other's experiences gives the students courage to interact and share their experiences with the class and their friends.
- ii** Learning by errors is a very effective technique because makes sure that the student is attentive to what is happening around him. Asking them to correct a mistake, allows you to know if they have understood the concept and the lesson or not.



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