ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
July-September 2026 3(2)
https://shodhsamajik.com/

Original Article

TEACHING IS NOT THE SAME AS EDUCATING: A REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY ON THE FORGOTTEN PURPOSE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and educating are often used interchangeably in higher education, yet they represent fundamentally different concepts. Teaching generally refers to the transmission of knowledge, delivery of curriculum, and achievement of predetermined learning outcomes, whereas educating encompasses the broader and deeper process of developing intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, ethical values, scientific integrity, and lifelong learning. In recent decades, universities have increasingly emphasized measurable indicators of teaching effectiveness through course evaluations, curriculum mapping, accreditation requirements, and learning outcome assessments. Although these mechanisms contribute to quality assurance, they may unintentionally narrow the meaning of education by focusing on what can be documented rather than what truly transforms students. This reflective commentary explores the distinction between teaching and educating from the perspective of higher education, research informed learning, and academic mentorship. Drawing upon literature on educational philosophy, scholarship, and university governance, the paper argues that genuine education is a long-term developmental journey that cannot be fully evaluated through annual performance indicators or administrative documentation. Universities should therefore recognise that excellent teaching is only one component of education, while educating requires sustained mentorship, intellectual engagement, moral development, and research driven inquiry. A balanced university should aspire not merely to produce graduates who pass examinations but to cultivate educated individuals capable of independent thinking, responsible citizenship, and lifelong contributions to society.

Keywords: Higher Education, Teaching, Educating, Scholarship, Mentorship, Research Informed Teaching, Reflective Commentary

INTRODUCTION

Universities have long regarded teaching as one of their central missions. Academic staff are expected to design curricula, deliver lectures, supervise projects, assess students, and continuously improve learning experiences. Across the world, universities invest considerable resources in enhancing teaching quality through curriculum development, learning technologies, accreditation systems, outcome-based education, and student evaluations Biggs and Tang (2011). These initiatives have undoubtedly improved consistency and accountability within higher education.

Recent scholarship has further highlighted that the distinction between teaching and educating remains one of the most neglected philosophical issues in higher education. Contemporary universities increasingly evaluate teaching through measurable indicators such as student satisfaction surveys, curriculum alignment, graduate employability, digital learning innovations, and learning outcome attainment. Although these indicators provide useful evidence for institutional accountability, they often overlook

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Received: 06 July 2026; **Accepted:** 23 August 2026; **Published:** 11 September 2026
DOI: 10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v3.i2.2026.134
Page Number: 138-146
Journal Title: ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies
Journal Abbreviation: ShodhSamajik J. Soc. Stud.
Online ISSN: 3049-2319, **Print ISSN:** 3108-2009
Publisher: Granthaalayah Publications and Printers, India
Conflict of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Authors' Contributions: Each author made an equal contribution to the conception and design of the study. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.
Transparency: The authors affirm that this manuscript presents an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study. All essential aspects have been included, and any deviations from the original study plan have been clearly explained. The writing process strictly adhered to established ethical standards.
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education's deeper purpose of cultivating students' intellectual identity, ethical judgement, self-awareness, and capacity for lifelong inquiry Cowan (2023). Consequently, higher education risks becoming increasingly occupied with measuring educational processes while paying less attention to whether genuine education has actually occurred. Reclaiming the distinction between teaching and educating therefore represents not only a pedagogical concern but also a strategic necessity for universities seeking to preserve their fundamental academic mission.

However, an important philosophical question is increasingly overlooked: Is teaching the same as educating? While the two concepts are closely related, they are not identical. Teaching primarily concerns the delivery of knowledge and skills, whereas educating involves shaping the whole person intellectually, ethically, professionally, and socially Biesta (2009). Education extends beyond classroom instruction to include the cultivation of curiosity, scientific reasoning, integrity, resilience, compassion, and independent judgement.

The objective of this reflective commentary is to examine the distinction between teaching and educating within contemporary universities and to argue that higher education should focus not only on delivering knowledge but also on cultivating scholars and responsible citizens through long term intellectual development.

TEACHING DELIVERS KNOWLEDGE, EDUCATION DEVELOPS PEOPLE

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual distinction between teaching and education within the context of higher education. Teaching is presented as an organised instructional process that focuses on delivering knowledge through curriculum planning, concept explanation, practical activities, assessment, and evaluation of student achievement. In contrast, education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge by fostering intellectual, ethical, emotional, social, and professional development. The framework further demonstrates that research informed education encourages students to engage with scientific uncertainty, formulate hypotheses, critically evaluate evidence, make ethical decisions, and actively participate in knowledge creation rather than remaining passive recipients of information. Consequently, while effective teaching provides the essential foundation for learning, education cultivates reflective, independent, and lifelong learners who possess the curiosity, critical thinking abilities, and personal responsibility necessary to contribute meaningfully to society and advance knowledge beyond graduation.

Figure 1

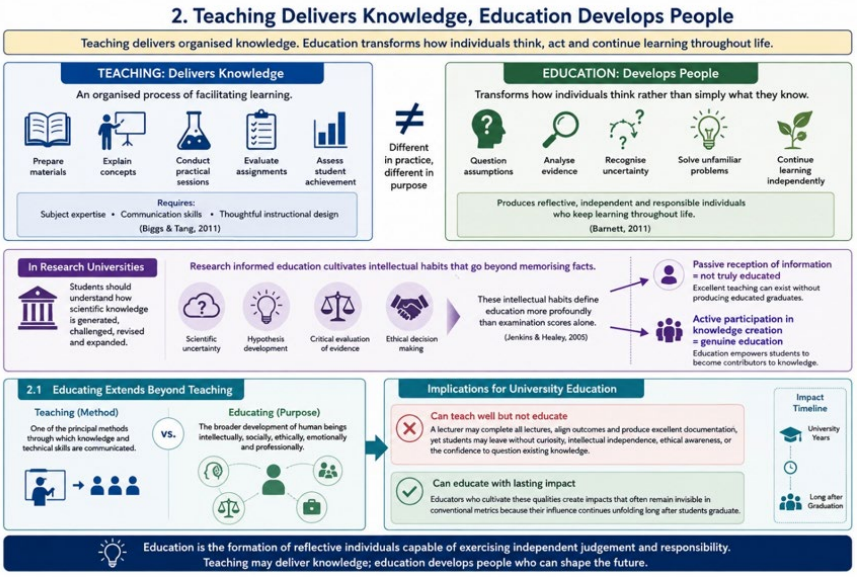


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Distinction Between Teaching and Education in Higher Education: From Knowledge Delivery to Holistic Human Development

Teaching represents an organised process of facilitating learning. Lecturers prepare instructional materials, explain concepts, conduct practical sessions, evaluate assignments, and assess student achievement. Effective teaching requires subject expertise, communication skills, and thoughtful instructional design Biggs and Tang (2011).

Education, however, reaches much further. Education transforms how individuals think rather than simply what they know. An educated graduate does not merely remember information but learns how to question assumptions, analyse evidence, recognise uncertainty, solve unfamiliar problems, and continue learning independently throughout life Barnett (2011).

This distinction becomes particularly important in research universities. Students should not simply memorise established scientific facts but should understand how scientific knowledge is generated, challenged, revised, and expanded. Research informed education introduces students to scientific uncertainty, hypothesis development, critical evaluation of evidence, and ethical decision making Jenkins and Healey (2005). These intellectual habits define education more profoundly than examination scores alone.

Consequently, excellent teaching can exist without producing truly educated graduates if students remain passive recipients of information. Conversely, genuine education encourages students to become active participants in knowledge creation.

EDUCATING EXTENDS BEYOND TEACHING

Teaching and educating differ not only in practice but also in purpose. Teaching represents one of the principal methods through which knowledge and technical skills are communicated, whereas educating encompasses the broader development of human beings intellectually, socially, ethically, emotionally, and professionally. Cowan (2023) argues that educators should adopt a subjectivity-centric approach in which students are recognised as developing individuals rather than merely recipients of instructional content. Under this perspective, education is not simply the successful completion of learning objectives but the formation of reflective individuals capable of exercising independent judgement and responsibility.

This distinction has important implications for university education. A lecturer may successfully complete every scheduled lecture, align every course outcome with programme outcomes, and produce exemplary teaching documentation, yet still fail to educate students if learners leave university without curiosity, intellectual independence, ethical awareness, or the confidence to question existing knowledge. Conversely, educators who cultivate these qualities often produce impacts that remain invisible within conventional institutional metrics because their influence continues unfolding long after students graduate.

THE DANGER OF MEASURING TEACHING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION

Figure 2 presents a conceptual framework demonstrating the relationship between teaching performance measurement and the broader purposes of education in higher education. The framework acknowledges that measurable indicators, including student evaluations, curriculum documentation, accreditation evidence, teaching portfolios, educational innovations, and learning outcome achievements, contribute to institutional accountability and quality assurance. However, it also illustrates the potential risk of allowing performance indicators to become institutional targets that shift academic attention towards bureaucratic compliance rather than meaningful educational development. The figure further integrates the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) with Biesta's three educational functions of qualification, socialisation, and subjectification, emphasising that while OBE effectively supports curriculum coherence and competency development, education also encompasses intellectual independence, ethical responsibility, scientific curiosity, and personal maturity that cannot always be predefined or quantified. Overall, the framework highlights the need for universities to balance accountability with educational purpose, ensuring that measurement systems support rather than replace the fundamental mission of developing reflective, autonomous, and lifelong learners.

Figure 2

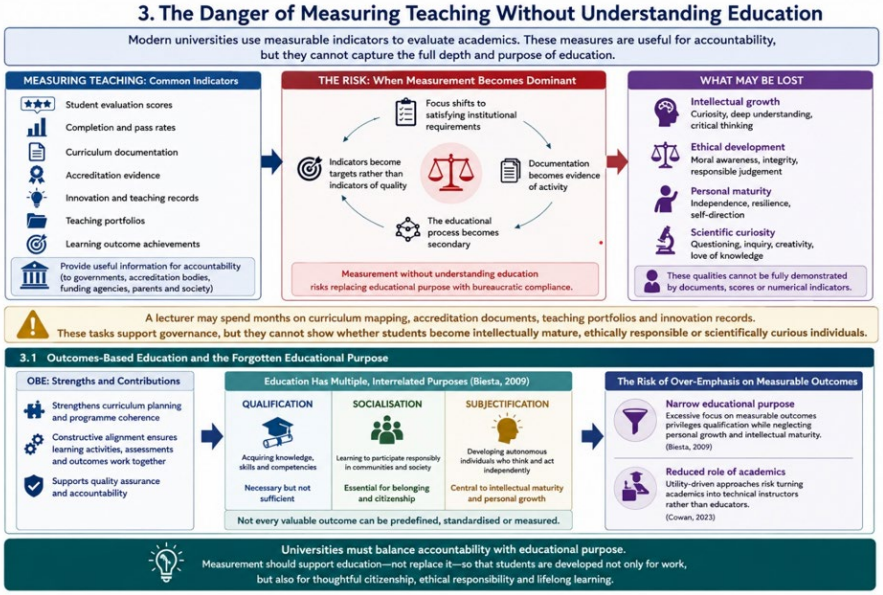


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Limitations of Performance Measurement in Higher Education and the Broader Educational Purpose Beyond Teaching Accountability

Modern universities increasingly evaluate academic staff using measurable indicators. Student evaluation scores, completion rates, curriculum documentation, accreditation evidence, innovation records, teaching portfolios, and learning outcome achievements have become common components of academic performance assessment Power (1997).

Such measures undoubtedly provide useful information. Universities have legitimate responsibilities to demonstrate accountability to governments, accreditation bodies, funding agencies, parents, and society. Nevertheless, educational quality cannot be reduced entirely to measurable indicators.

Biesta (2009) argues that contemporary education increasingly values measurement over educational purpose. When numerical indicators become dominant, educators may gradually focus on satisfying institutional requirements instead of nurturing intellectual growth. Documentation becomes evidence of activity, but not necessarily evidence of meaningful education.

Similarly, Strathern (1997) observed that performance indicators frequently become targets rather than indicators of quality. Once academics begin working primarily to satisfy measurement systems, the educational process itself may become secondary.

A lecturer may spend months completing curriculum mapping, preparing accreditation documents, producing teaching portfolios, and recording educational innovations. While these tasks contribute to institutional governance, they cannot fully demonstrate whether students have become intellectually mature, ethically responsible, or scientifically curious individuals.

OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND THE FORGOTTEN EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

The widespread implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has undoubtedly strengthened curriculum planning, programme coherence, and quality assurance across higher education institutions. Constructive alignment ensures that learning activities, assessments, and intended learning outcomes operate coherently to support student learning Biggs and Tang (2011). Nevertheless, educational philosophy reminds us that not every valuable educational outcome can be predefined, standardised, or measured quantitatively.

Biesta (2009) argues that education serves multiple purposes beyond qualification, including socialisation and subjectification. While qualification focuses on acquiring knowledge and competencies, subjectification concerns the development of autonomous individuals capable of independent thought and responsible action. Excessive emphasis on measurable outcomes may therefore privilege qualification while neglecting the equally important aims of personal growth and intellectual maturity.

Similarly, Cowan (2023) observes that higher education increasingly adopts utility-driven approaches that define educational success primarily through measurable performance indicators. Such approaches risk narrowing the role of academics to technical instructors rather than educators who nurture critical reflection, moral reasoning, and scholarly identity.

EDUCATION HAPPENS THROUGH MENTORSHIP

Figure 3 presents a conceptual framework illustrating mentorship as the defining element that distinguishes education from teaching in higher education. While teaching primarily occurs through formal lectures, practical classes, assessments, and structured instructional activities, education extends beyond the classroom through sustained mentoring relationships that develop students intellectually, professionally, ethically, and personally. The framework demonstrates that meaningful educational experiences emerge through research supervision, fieldwork, laboratory challenges, manuscript revision, career guidance, constructive feedback, and ongoing dialogue between educators and students. It further emphasises that research supervision represents a long-term developmental process requiring continuous intellectual guidance, emotional support, scientific mentoring, and progressive independence rather than short term knowledge transmission. Drawing upon relational perspectives of higher education, the figure highlights that education is fundamentally built upon dialogue, collaboration, reflection, and mutual engagement with knowledge, transforming academics from content experts into mentors, facilitators, critical friends, and intellectual role models. Ultimately, the framework underscores that the lasting impact of higher education is measured not merely by instructional activities or performance indicators, but by the development of independent, ethical, intellectually curious, and lifelong learners through meaningful educational relationships.

Figure 3

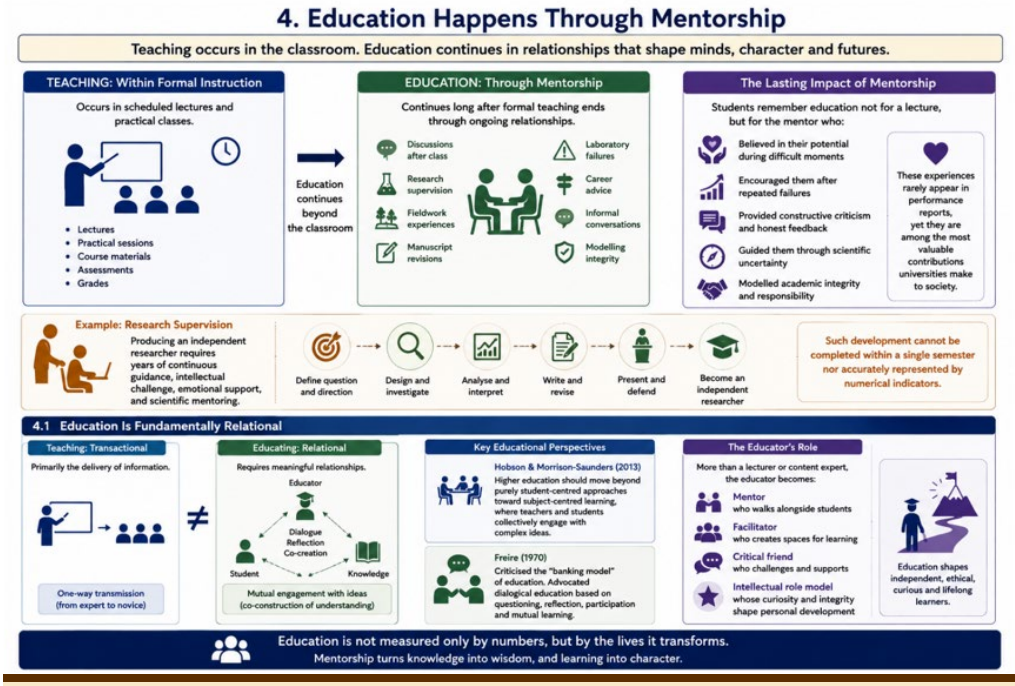


Figure 3 Conceptual Framework Illustrating Mentorship as the Relational Foundation of Education Beyond Formal Teaching in Higher Education

Perhaps the greatest difference between teaching and educating lies in mentorship.

Teaching often occurs within scheduled lectures and practical classes. Education continues long after formal teaching ends. It develops through discussions after class, research supervision, fieldwork experiences, laboratory failures, manuscript revisions, career advice, and countless informal conversations between students and their mentors.

Many students remember their university education not because of a particular lecture but because a lecturer believed in their potential during difficult moments. Encouragement after repeated research failures, constructive criticism during thesis writing, guidance through scientific uncertainty, and the modelling of academic integrity frequently shape students more profoundly than classroom instruction itself.

These educational experiences rarely appear within annual performance reports. Yet they represent some of the most valuable contributions universities make to society.

Research supervision provides an excellent example. Producing an independent researcher requires years of continuous guidance, intellectual challenge, emotional support, and scientific mentoring. Such development cannot be completed within a single semester nor accurately represented by numerical indicators.

EDUCATION IS FUNDAMENTALLY RELATIONAL

Education is fundamentally relational rather than transactional. Teaching may involve the delivery of information, but educating requires meaningful relationships between educators, students, and knowledge itself. Hobson and Morrison-Saunders (2013) argue that higher education should move beyond purely student-centred approaches toward subject-centred learning, where teachers and students collectively engage with complex ideas rather than treating education as the transmission of information from expert to novice.

Likewise, Freire (1970) criticised the traditional "banking model" of education in which students passively receive deposits of knowledge from teachers. Instead, education should become a dialogical process characterised by questioning, reflection, participation, and mutual learning. Such relational pedagogies encourage students to become active creators of knowledge rather than passive consumers of information.

This relational understanding also reshapes the educator's role. Rather than functioning solely as lecturers or content experts, academics become mentors, facilitators, critical friends, and intellectual role models whose own curiosity and integrity influence students' personal development.

EDUCATING THROUGH RESEARCH

Figure 4 presents a conceptual framework demonstrating how research, inclusive pedagogy, and teaching expertise collectively contribute to meaningful education in contemporary universities. The framework highlights that research universities achieve their distinctive educational mission by integrating active research with teaching, enabling students to engage with current scientific discoveries, unresolved questions, critical inquiry, intellectual humility, and evidence-based reasoning. It further illustrates that educating increasingly diverse student populations requires inclusive, culturally responsive, and partnership-based pedagogies that recognise students as active contributors to knowledge creation rather than passive recipients of instruction. In addition, the framework emphasises that while investments in teaching excellence, educational technologies, and pedagogical innovation strengthen instructional quality, these improvements alone do not guarantee genuine education unless they cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, intellectual independence, adaptability, and lifelong learning. Overall, the framework reinforces that the ultimate purpose of research informed higher education is not merely to improve teaching performance or academic achievement, but to develop reflective, scientifically minded, socially responsible, and compassionate graduates capable of contributing meaningfully to knowledge, society, and future generations.

Figure 4

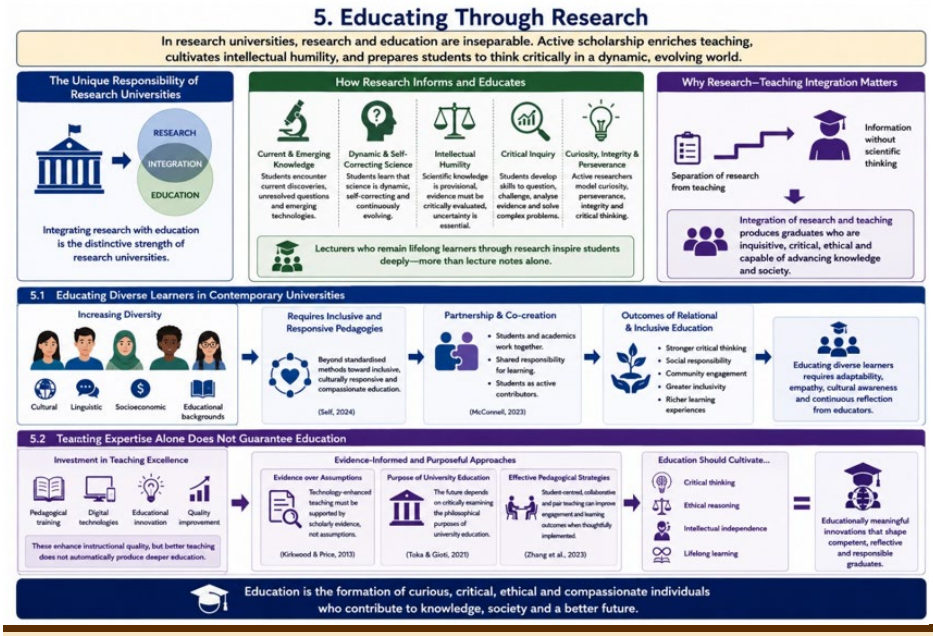


Figure 4 Conceptual Framework Illustrating Research Informed Education, Inclusive Pedagogy, and the Integration of Teaching Excellence with Broader Educational Purposes in Higher Education

Research universities possess a unique responsibility that distinguishes them from many other educational institutions. Their primary strength lies in integrating research with education.

When lecturers remain active researchers, classrooms become places where students encounter current scientific discoveries, unresolved questions, and emerging technologies rather than simply established textbook knowledge. Students learn that science is dynamic, self-correcting, and continuously evolving.

Research informed education also teaches intellectual humility. Students discover that scientific knowledge is provisional, evidence must be critically evaluated, and uncertainty represents an essential component of scholarly inquiry rather than a weakness.

Therefore, educating requires lecturers who themselves remain lifelong learners. Academics who continue conducting research demonstrate curiosity, perseverance, integrity, and critical thinking through their own professional practice. These qualities influence students far more deeply than lecture notes alone.

Universities that separate research from teaching risk producing graduates who possess information but lack genuine scientific thinking.

EDUCATING DIVERSE LEARNERS IN CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITIES

Higher education has undergone substantial demographic and cultural transformation during recent decades. Universities now educate students from increasingly diverse cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Such diversity requires educational approaches that extend beyond standardised teaching methods toward inclusive, culturally responsive, and compassionate pedagogies Self (2024).

McConnell (2023) further argues that partnership and co-creation between students and academics strengthen social pedagogy by encouraging shared responsibility for learning. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of instruction, partnership models recognise learners as active contributors whose experiences enrich educational processes. These collaborative relationships strengthen critical thinking, social responsibility, and community engagement while fostering greater inclusivity within higher education.

Consequently, educating diverse learners requires far more than delivering identical lectures to increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. It demands adaptability, empathy, cultural awareness, and continuous reflection from educators themselves.

TEACHING EXPERTISE ALONE DOES NOT GUARANTEE EDUCATION

Universities increasingly invest in teaching excellence programmes, digital technologies, educational innovation, and pedagogical training. While these developments undoubtedly improve instructional quality, they should not lead to the assumption that improved teaching automatically results in deeper education.

Kirkwood and Price (2013) caution that technology enhanced teaching should be supported by scholarly evidence rather than assumptions regarding effectiveness. Similarly, Toka and Gioti (2021) argue that the future of higher education depends not only upon adopting innovative teaching methods but also upon critically examining the philosophical purposes of university education itself.

Recent evidence further demonstrates that student-centred instructional strategies, including collaborative and pair teaching approaches, can improve engagement and learning outcomes when thoughtfully implemented Zhang et al. (2023). However, these pedagogical innovations remain educationally meaningful only when they contribute to broader goals such as critical thinking, ethical reasoning, intellectual independence, and lifelong learning rather than simply improving assessment performance.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflecting upon academic life reveals that many of the most meaningful educational achievements become visible only after many years. Publications may accumulate annually, grants may be awarded periodically, and teaching evaluations may fluctuate each semester. However, the true impact of education often emerges when former students become thoughtful researchers, ethical professionals, innovative leaders, or dedicated educators themselves.

Some students require years before fully appreciating lessons that extended beyond lecture content. Others gradually develop confidence after repeated encouragement during difficult research projects. Many eventually realise that the greatest gift provided by their lecturers was not information but the confidence to think independently.

This long developmental process explains why educating cannot be compressed into annual performance indicators. Intellectual maturity develops gradually through sustained exposure to challenging ideas, research experiences, constructive criticism, and responsible mentorship. Universities should therefore recognise that education represents an investment whose returns frequently appear decades rather than months after teaching has taken place

Reflecting upon decades of university education reveals that students rarely remember every lecture, laboratory exercise, or examination question. Instead, they often remember educators who challenged them to think differently, questioned their assumptions, inspired confidence during periods of uncertainty, and demonstrated intellectual integrity through their own scholarly conduct. These educational encounters gradually shape students' identities as researchers, professionals, and responsible citizens. Such transformations frequently emerge years after graduation, making them difficult to recognise within annual academic performance evaluations. This reality reminds us that the true measure of education lies not merely in what students know at the end of a semester but in who they become throughout their lives.

CONCLUSION

Teaching and educating are closely connected but fundamentally different. Teaching focuses on transmitting knowledge, whereas educating seeks to develop intellectually independent, ethically responsible, and scientifically curious individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

Modern universities rightly pursue accountability through quality assurance systems and measurable performance indicators. However, these mechanisms should support rather than define education. When documentation becomes more important than intellectual transformation, universities risk confusing evidence of educational activity with evidence of educational success.

The enduring mission of higher education is not merely to deliver lectures or produce graduates who satisfy learning outcomes. It is to educate individuals who continue questioning, discovering, creating, and contributing long after they leave university. Such individuals become scholars, innovators, professionals, and citizens whose influence extends far beyond institutional performance reports.

Ultimately, teaching fills minds with knowledge, but education shapes minds to seek wisdom. Universities fulfil their highest purpose not when they produce the most documentation, but when they cultivate people who never stop learning.

Reclaiming the distinction between teaching and educating is increasingly important as universities navigate growing demands for accountability, employability, accreditation, and institutional competitiveness. Effective teaching remains indispensable, but it should always serve the broader purpose of education. Universities ultimately exist not simply to transfer information but to cultivate reflective, ethical, intellectually independent individuals capable of generating new knowledge and contributing wisely to society. When educational success becomes defined solely through measurable indicators, universities risk producing competent graduates without necessarily producing educated human beings. The greatest legacy of higher education therefore lies not in perfect documentation or performance metrics but in its enduring capacity to transform lives through scholarship, mentorship, and intellectual growth.

DECLARATION ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence tools were used in a supportive capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. These tools assisted with language refinement, structural organisation, and stylistic clarity of the text. All ideas, interpretations, reflections, and conclusions presented in this paper are the author's own and are grounded in personal experience and scholarly judgment. The author retains full responsibility for the content, accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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