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# Teacher as Agile Learner: Enhancing Education through Learning Agility

Merin M. Thomas
Research Scholar
Research Center in Education
N.S.S Training College Ottappalam
University of Calicut

Prof. (Dr.) Smitha R
Professor in Education and Research Supervisor,
Research Center in Education
N.S.S Training College Ottappalam
University of Calicut

## Abstract

In the constantly changing field of education, teachers must continually adapt to diverse learner needs, technological advancements, and pedagogical reforms. This conceptual paper explores the role of Learning Agility - the capacity to gain knowledge from past experiences and utilize it effectively in new or unfamiliar situations, as a critical skill for modern educators. It examines the concept and components of Learning Agility and highlights its relevance to teaching practice. It conceptualizes teachers as agile learners capable of reflecting, adapting, and evolving their practices to meet the demands of modern education. Furthermore, it outlines practical strategies to enhance Learning Agility in both teachers and students, emphasizing the need for professional development, experiential learning, and collaborative reflection. By cultivating Learning Agility, teachers can foster inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environments that drive student success and educational advancement.

*Keywords:* Learning agility, mental agility, people agility, result agility, change agility, self-awareness, teacher as agile learner

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## Introduction

The teaching profession is undergoing significant transformation due to globalization, digitalization, and changing learner profiles. As the central figures in the learning process, teachers must go beyond traditional roles and adopt adaptive mindsets to remain effective. To remain effective, teachers must develop the ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn continuously. This ability is best described as Learning Agility.

"Learning Agility refers to the capability to learn from a variety of experiences and adapt effectively." (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000) "and apply it efficiently and with flexibility in uncertain conditions." (DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012). "It supports rational thinking, decision-making, and is a significant contributor to both career development and self-awareness." (De Meuse et al., 2010; Flaum & Winkler, 2015; De Meuse, 2017). Agile teachers are reflective practitioners who embrace continuous professional development, seek feedback, and adjust their practices based on student outcomes.

Furthermore, changing societal expectations have transformed the purpose of schools and the responsibilities of teachers and leaders. This transformation requires teachers to continuously upgrade their competencies, stay current, and be prepared to take on demanding roles like making effective decisions. However, managing uncertain situations is not easy. The ability to anticipate problems, reason through them, and make timely and appropriate decisions requires a certain agility (Jonier & Josephs, 2007).

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Individual experiences (Bruine de Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2020) shape learning preferences (Sproles & Sproles, 1990), which in turn influence how teachers and leaders make decisions under uncertainty and risk (Stanton & Roelich, 2021; Wilson, 1971). “Recent conceptual and practical studies emphasize that Learning Agility is a major determinant of persons having exceptional performance and strong leadership potential.” (Bedford, 2011; Smith, 2015; De Meuse, 2019; Howard, 2017). Accordingly, this concept has gained attention in educational contexts, where researchers have explored the decision-making approaches adopted by both school principals (Savery, Soutar & Dyson, 1992; Hansson & Andersen, 2007; Andersen, 2010; Olcum & Titrek, 2015; Hariri, Monypenny & Prideaux, 2016) and educators. (Vanlommel, Vanhoof & Van Petegem, 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to explores the importance of cultivating Learning Agility among teachers, highlighting how it enhances instructional effectiveness, supports inclusive education, and ultimately leads to improved student achievement. By understanding and developing Learning Agility, educators can thrive in complex teaching environments and contribute meaningfully to the future of education.

## Learning Agility - Concept

Lombardo and Morrison first introduced the term Learning Agility in their book “The Lessons of Experience”, published in 1988. (Harvey & Meuse, 2021). “Learning Agility and Learning Ability are closely related concepts that play a vital function in career progress and advancement.” (De Meuse et al., 2010). Woodrow (1946) described “Learning ability as the

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minimal time required to derive learning from observation and recorded information". Korn Ferry (2011) defines Learning Agility as the ability to extract knowledge from past experiences and effectively adapt it to new challenges.

Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) defined Learning Agility as the readiness and capacity to gain knowledge from experience and then apply that learning to succeed in new or unfamiliar situations. Several scholars have further described Learning Agility by taking into account various related factors. e.g., "the ability to learn quickly and adaptively" (Vandewelle,2012) and "adaptability under challenging conditions" (Saputra et. al. 2018). Based on these definitions, Learning Agility denotes the capability to quickly learn, adapt, and implement new knowledge and skills in diverse and changing situations, enabling individuals to effectively respond to challenges and opportunities.

"Learning Agility is a characteristic connected with cognitive skills such as verbal, numerical, and abstract reasoning." (Ashford & Myers, 2012; Allen, 2016; DeRue, Miller, 2018), accepting ambiguity and adapting one's behavior with flexibility. (Allen, 2016), and willingness to explore new experiences. (Laxon, 2018). Five principal components of Learning Agility have been identified by researchers as "People Agility, Change Agility, Mental Agility, Result Agility, and Self-Awareness". (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; De Meuse et al., 2011; Gravet & Chadwel, 2016).

**Learning Agility - Components (Based on research by De Meuse, Lombardo, and Eichinger)**

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Learning Agility exists in every individual; however, according to Lombardo and Eichinger (2000), the degree to which each of its five dimensions - such as People Agility, Change Agility, Results Agility, Mental Agility, and Self-Awareness - is exhibited varies from person to person.


Mental Agility – It signifies the capability to think critically, analyse complex problems, and approach challenges with flexibility. People with Mental Agility are comfortable dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty, often finding creative solutions to problems. They embrace different perspectives and explore new ways of thinking rather than sticking to conventional methods.

People Agility –People Agility means understanding and relating well to others. It involves the ability to collaborate effectively with others, build strong relationships, and adapt to different social and cultural environments. People who possess this trait are emotionally

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intelligent, open to learning from diverse individuals, and skilled at handling interpersonal challenges.

Change Agility –It means embracing change and experimenting with new ideas. Instead of resisting change. Individuals with Change Agility see it as an opportunity for growth and innovation. They are quick to adopt new technologies, strategies, and practices to stay relevant in their field.

Results Agility – Result Agility is attaining success under new or difficult conditions. It refers to the ability to perform well under pressure, take risks, and achieve success in unfamiliar situations. People with this trait are action-oriented, resilient, and capable of delivering effective outcomes despite challenges. They learn from both successes and failures, continuously improving their performance.

Self-Awareness – Self-awareness forms the basis of Learning Agility, as it includes awareness of one's abilities, shortcomings, and areas for improvement. Individuals with high self-awareness actively seek feedback, reflect on their experiences, and make conscious efforts to improve. They recognize how their actions impact others and are open to constructive criticism.

**A Summary of the Components of Learning Agility**

| Learning Agility | Components |
|---|---|
| Mental Agility | Critical Thinking, Creative Problem solving, Cognitive Flexibility, Adaptability, open mindedness |

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| | |
|---|---|
| People Agility | Building relationships, Collaboration Skills, Cultural and Social Adaptability, Interpersonal Problem-Solving, Active Listening and Communication |
| Change Agility | Adaptability, Emotional Resilience, Openness to Learning, Proactive Mindset, Risk Tolerance, Growth Orientation |
| Result Agility | Action Orientation, Risk-Taking, Resilience, Goal Focus, Performance Under Pressure |
| Self-Awareness | Emotional Awareness, Self-Assessment, Feedback Receptiveness, Awareness of Impact on Others |

**Teachers as Agile Learners**

In education, the teacher in the classroom is recognized as the most influential factor affecting student achievement and learning (Sanders & Horn, 1998), making it essential for teachers to continuously adapt, learn, and grow - qualities that define an agile learner. In an environment that is always changing, teachers, just as business employees, need to be flexible to adapt, while at the same time, staying effective, productive, and delivering experiences that promote learning in today's world and into the future (Vaill, 1996). Bringing about changes aimed at improving student achievement is often challenging and frequently faces resistance; however, educators have a duty to carry out these changes to enhance students' educational experiences despite the obstacles involved. (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

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Teachers today face rapidly shifting educational challenges, including the integration of digital tools and artificial intelligence, addressing diverse learner needs, and implementing inclusive teaching practices. Additionally, there is an increasing emphasis on competency-based and student- centered learning approaches. To effectively manage these complexities, teachers must become agile learners - professionals who continuously adapt, unlearn outdated methods, and implement new methods by reflecting on classroom experiences, seeking feedback for ongoing growth, and experimenting with innovative strategies based on student outcomes. Being an agile learner enables teachers to respond proactively to change, personalize instruction, and foster meaningful learning experiences that fulfill the requirements of every learner in a dynamic educational environment. “You cannot expect students to be lifelong learners and effective collaborators unless teachers themselves have these same qualities” (Fullan, 1993, p. 46). Therefore, teachers need to be as agile in their learning and delivery as students.

## Role of Learning Agility Components in Educational Practice

**Mental Agility** – “The capacity to find comfort in complexity and make connections between different things to examine problems” (Gravett & Caldwell, 2016). It plays an important role in advancing both teaching and learning experiences within the dynamic context of education.

For teachers, Mental Agility enables them to think critically, adapt to unpredictable classroom environments, and develop innovative solutions to pedagogical challenges. It helps educators adapt to curriculum changes, integrate interdisciplinary knowledge and personalize

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learning strategies to meet diverse student needs. Teachers with strong Mental Agility are open to exploring unconventional teaching methods and are more effective in engaging students through creative problem-solving and flexible instruction.

For students, Mental Agility fosters the ability to analyse complex problems, make connections across subjects, and helps to consider multiple perspectives. It helps learners do well in unclear situations and stay strong when things are uncertain. By cultivating Mental Agility, both teachers and students are more capable of managing the challenges of modern education and contribute meaningfully to continuous academic growth and improvement.

**People Agility –** "The ability to understand and build relationships with others to raise collective group performance." (Korn Ferry, 2016). It is a key competency in educational contexts, effectively supporting teachers and learners in fostering collaborative, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent environments.

For teachers, People Agility enhances the ability to connect meaningfully with students, colleagues, and parents, thereby creating a supportive and respectful classroom culture. It helps educators understand diverse student backgrounds, manage interpersonal challenges with empathy, and collaborate effectively within professional learning communities. Emotionally intelligent and socially aware teachers can better motivate students, manage conflicts, and respond to individual learning needs.

For students, developing People Agility encourages teamwork, active listening, and mutual respect - skills essential for group projects, peer interactions, and future workplaces. By

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building People Agility, schools can establish a culture that nurtures interpersonal relationships and collaborative efforts, helping students learn better through effective communication and teamwork.

**Change Agility** – "Change Agility refers to the skill of anticipating and responding proactively to change, using it as an opportunity for improvement and growth." (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014; Zhang & Sharifi, 2000). It plays a crucial role in the educational environment, where rapid advancements in technology, changing curricula and shifting student needs demand constant adaptation.

For teachers, Change Agility means adopting educational reforms, integrating digital tools, and experimenting with innovative instructional practices that promote student motivation and enhance learning effectiveness. Agile educators view change not as a disruption but as an opportunity for growth, professional development, and pedagogical improvement. They respond proactively to new teaching methods and educational challenges, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in a dynamic environment.

For students, cultivating Change Agility fosters resilience, adaptability, and a growth mindset - qualities that are essential for lifelong learning and success in an ever-changing world. By encouraging Change Agility, schools can empower both teachers and students to handle changes confidently and use uncertainty to create new ideas and improvements in education.

**Results Agility -** Results Agility is the capacity to achieve outcomes in novel situations by motivating teams, working through others, and demonstrating a strong drive for high

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performance. (Korn Ferry, 2016). It is essential in education, where teachers and students frequently encounter novel and unpredictable situations that require quick thinking and effective problem-solving.

For teachers, Results agility enables them to deliver meaningful learning outcomes even in challenging circumstances, such as transitioning to digital instruction, addressing diverse classroom needs, or implementing new curriculum standards. These educators are action-oriented and resilient, using systematic approaches to devise and apply effective solutions that meet learning objectives. They are also reflective, learning from both their successes and setbacks to enhance their teaching practices.

For students, developing Result Agility encourages the ability to tackle unfamiliar tasks, manage academic pressure, and pursue goals with perseverance. Students with this trait become self-directed learners who don't give up when they fail but learn from it to get better. Cultivating Result Agility among teachers and students thus contributes to a dynamic, responsive, and achievement-oriented educational environment.

**Self-Awareness** - "Self-Awareness is a higher-order construct that reflects how consciously individuals recognize their internal states and their interactions or relationships with others." (Sutton et al., 2015). It serves as the foundational pillar of Learning Agility in educational practice, guiding both teachers and students toward meaningful growth and development.

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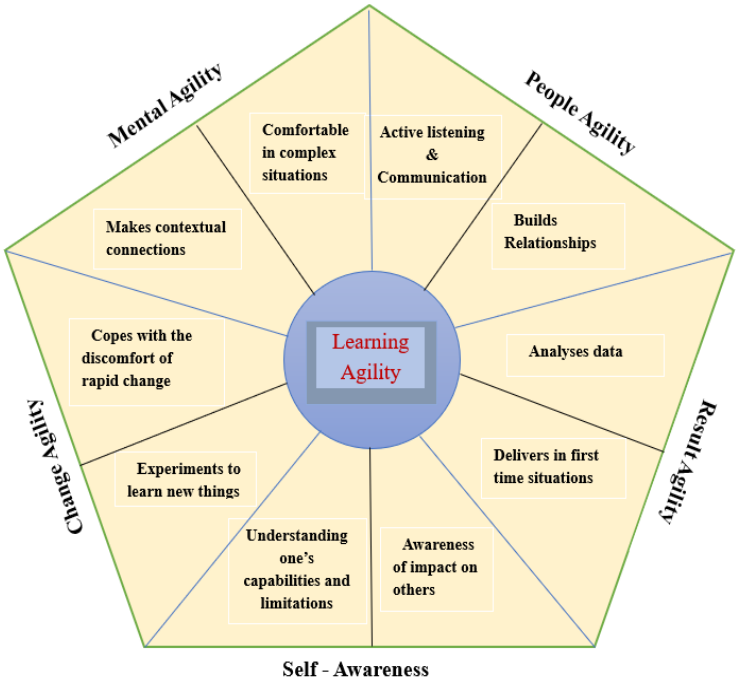
For teachers, Self-Awareness promotes reflective practice - enabling them to assess their instructional strategies, understand their emotional responses in the classroom, and make informed adjustments to enhance teaching effectiveness. Teachers who are self-aware recognize their strengths and limitations, seek constructive feedback, and continuously refine their professional identity and leadership potential.

For students, cultivating Self-Awareness fosters emotional intelligence, responsible decision-making, and self-directed learning. It empowers learners to recognize how their attitudes, behaviours and habits affect their academic progress and relationships with peers and teachers. When both educators and students engage in conscious reflection and personal insight, the educational environment becomes one that values growth, empathy, and purposeful action - key qualities needed to thrive in modern education.



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## Ways to Enhance Learning Agility among Teachers and Students

**Mental Agility -** Enhancing Mental Agility in teachers and students involves developing critical thinking, adaptability, and the capacity to manage complexity and ambiguity.

**For Teachers:**

- Encourage Critical Thinking Practices - Use inquiry-based learning, Socratic questioning, and reflective discussions to challenge assumptions.
- Participate in Reflective Practice - Regular self-reflection and journaling help teachers evaluate their methods and consider alternative approaches.
- Adopt Flexible Teaching Strategies - Be open to changing lesson plans or instructional approaches when student needs or circumstances shift.

**For Students:**

- Foster Curiosity and Questioning - Promote a classroom culture where asking "why" and "what if" is encouraged.
- Use Open-Ended Projects - Assign tasks that require creative solutions and multiple approaches, encouraging students to connect ideas.
- Teach Critical Thinking and Metacognition - Help students become aware of their thought processes and teach them how to evaluate evidence and arguments.
- Practice Cognitive exercises **-** Regularly engage in activities such as puzzles, Sudoku, crosswords, memory games that stimulate different cognitive skills.

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**People Agility -** Enhancing People Agility in teachers and students involves developing interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and the ability to collaborate effectively.

**For Teachers:**

- Engage in Collaborative Teaching - Co-teach or participate in team teaching to build stronger relationships and learn from colleagues' teaching styles.
- Participate in Diversity and Inclusion Training - Gain insight into working with students from various cultural and social backgrounds.
- Seek and Offer Constructive Feedback **-** Create open channels of communication with peers and students to foster mutual growth and trust.

**For Students:**

- Incorporate Collaborative Learning Activities - Use group projects, peer teaching, and cooperative games to promote teamwork and communication.
- Celebrate Diversity in the Classroom - Highlight different cultural practices, languages, and experiences to foster inclusivity and understanding.
- Organize Group Discussions and Debates - Promote open dialogue on current issues to help students express their views while respecting others.

**Change Agility -** Enhancing Change Agility in teachers and students involves building resilience, openness to innovation, and a proactive mindset toward new experiences and shifts in the educational environment.

**For Teachers:**

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- Engage in Ongoing Professional Development - Attend workshops, courses, and webinars focused on emerging trends, technologies, and pedagogies.
- Experiment with New Teaching Strategies - Try out innovative instructional methods.
- Participate in Educational Reforms - Stay informed and actively involved in curriculum or policy changes at the school or district level.

**For Students:**

- Teach Adaptability Skills - Use classroom activities that require flexibility in roles, tasks, or perspectives.
- Encourage Reflection After Change - Guide students in reflecting on how they managed change
- Model Change Agility as a Teacher - Demonstrate openness to feedback and visibly adapt based on classroom dynamics or student needs.

**Result Agility -** Enhancing results agility in teachers and students involves fostering the ability to deliver effective outcomes, especially in unfamiliar or high-pressure situations. It requires building problem-solving skills, resilience, accountability, and a solution-focused mindset.

**For Teachers:**

- Reflect on Successes and Failures - Analyse what worked and what didn't in classroom practices and use these insights to improve future performance.
- Build Resilience Through Professional Challenges - Accept and grow from setbacks by viewing them as opportunities for learning and improvement.

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- Promote Action-Oriented Thinking - Cultivate a proactive mindset focused on implementation and results rather than only planning or discussion.

**For Students:**

- Promote Accountability for Outcomes - Encourage students to take ownership of their learning by tracking performance and setting improvement plans.
- Use Reflection Activities - Incorporate structured reflection after assignments or exams to help students understand their performance and identify areas for growth.
- Provide Opportunities for Independent Work - Let students manage tasks and deadlines on their own to build confidence in navigating new challenges.

**Self- awareness -** Enhancing self-awareness in teachers and students is essential for fostering Learning Agility, as it helps individuals understand their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and the impact of their actions.

**For Teachers:**

- Engage in Reflective Practice - Maintain teaching journals to reflect on daily classroom experiences, decisions, and student responses.
- Seek Constructive Feedback - Encourage feedback from peers, mentors, and students to gain insight into teaching effectiveness and interpersonal behavior.
- Use Self-Assessment Tools **-** Complete personality, emotional intelligence, or teaching style inventories to explore personal traits and preferences.

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**For Students:**

- Encourage Reflective Journaling - Let students write about what they learned, what challenged them, and how they felt during learning activities.
- Use Self-Assessment Checklists - Provide rubrics or checklists for students to evaluate their work and learning habits.
- Facilitate Peer Feedback Sessions - Allow students to give and receive feedback to build awareness of how their work and behavior affect others.

## Conclusion

As education continues to evolve in response to technological, social, and pedagogical changes, the role of the teacher must also transform. Developing Learning Agility is essential for educators to remain relevant, responsive, and effective in addressing the diverse and shifting needs of learners. By promoting Learning Agility in both teachers and students, schools and institutions can cultivate a culture of adaptability, innovation, and growth and ensure that teaching practices remain aligned with the demands of the 21st-century classroom.

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