Research Article

EDUCATION: KNOWLEDGE OR EMPLOYMENT, LIFE-SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

There has always been a debate on educational reforms in our country, by making it more student friendly, but our current educational policies have failed to analyze the mindset of youth that, what "THEY" exactly want from the system. Today our schools spend more time separating successful and unsuccessful students rather than teaching them. Education has become more sort of a psychological burden with a shadow of uncertainity on the minds of youth rather than an enjoyable & learning experience. There is an undue stress of entrance exams, carrer prospects, jobs and worry of future attached with education among youth. Education has today been confined to, eyeing for 'High Pay Packages' in MNCs rather than curiousity to learn something. People are studying to 'Earn' not to 'Learn'. And even after dreaming for fat pay jobs, the million dollar question which arises is….Where are the Jobs? Are our universities's courses structured well enough to generate employment? We all want great jobs but our university courses are designed in a way that they don't provide enough practical exposure and field work required for jobs. Our course structures are so theoretical, outdated and textbook oriented that they don't generate enough opportunities. Therefore, an intense revision of the syllabus and a culture of innovation that will feed more startups needs to be promoted. There are long needing reforms in regulatory bodies like UGC, AICTE and MCI as well as to ammend the current educational policy which is solely based on rote learning and cramming.

Today, there is no specific teaching of moral values, life skills, creative, asthetic and performing skills, social service & well being among youth and that is why they are coping with high stress levels, depression, addiction, mood swings, loneliness and poor mental health. So, we really need to pause a little and ponder that how this 'Rat Race' of merely acquiring a valid college degree as a justification of proving onself, can be checked. There should be a debate on the multi-disciplinary approach of education and the need of introducing various new subjects/key fields according to the interest of students. There should be discussion about the new evaluation methods in colleges, reforming traditional theoretical course structures, marking & accreditation of students on holistic and broader parameters for promoting sustained, inclusive, multi-dimensional and equitable growth.

INTRODUCTION

Is our education system on the right track?

Every year we witness the lists of University Toppers, Medical & Engineering Toppers, UPSC Toppers and other prestigious exam's Toppers becoming the headlines everywhere. The toppers being showered with praises, become the poster boys and girls of all reputed coaching institutes of the country and other parents too, want their kids to be like them. With lakhs of students appearing for different entrances every year, someone would definitely come out first and emerge topper. There will be some top scorers, some will just barely make it and some will not get through it, but that's not the point. The larger point is whether our entire education system is based on just 'One' sole parameter which is to clear Entrances??? In India, we have a world-class filtration system in place of an education system. There have been so many examples & motivational stories of people who were not academic scholars but went on to become the most successful & iconic personalities of the world. There are inspiring people who today are holding the highest & key portfolios all over the world and are role models for the generations to come. There is one common Mantra which all these people followed, which was "The conviction and determination to follow heart and to chase dreams"

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Arrival of any exam season, builds anticipation among masses. And why it shouldn't be? For a country like ours, which is so academically oriented or we can say 'RESULT' oriented, exams have always been a huge affair. Your 'exam results' unite you even with your most distant relatives whom you haven't seen for years, now enquiring about your results. But jokes apart, with every year just the achievers & toppers list becoming the mainstream news everywhere, we are sidelining the grave problem which has become very deep rooted inside our system. Today youngsters are mortally afraid of examinations/results and worry a lot about their careers. Many of them are also afraid of not being able to 'do the right thing' in life and not being successful. The biggest fallout of worrying is insomnia, abnormal sleep patterns and early depression among youth.

There has always been a debate on the educational reforms in our country and how to make education student friendly but our policies and methodologies have failed to analyze the mindset of youth that what "**THEY**" exactly want from the system. Today our schools spend more time separating successful and unsuccessful students rather than teaching them. Education has become more sort of a psychological burden on the minds rather than an enjoyable and learning experience. It has come up with undue stress of entrance exams, career with shadow of uncertainty among youth. Education has today become totally confined to eyeing & dreaming about 'High Pay Packages' in MNCs rather than curiosity to learn something. Education which was earlier acquired for lifelong learning is now just perceived as a medium for making money. People are studying to 'Earn' not to 'Learn'. There is no specific teaching of moral values, life skills, social service, all round development and well being of society but only of the conventionally structured courses designed by our universities.

Current Employbility Crisis

And even after dreaming for fat pay jobs and focusing on minting great money, the million dollar question which arises is….Where are the Jobs??? Are our universities' courses structured well enough to provide employment? Does a valid degree today guarantees a job? Are we giving enough practical exposure to students apart from making them memorise facts, scientific definitions and theories? Are all the people who are placed, happy with their jobs? Are there sufficient career counseling services and guides available in our colleges?

These are the questions which we as a society need to ask and deeply ponder. We want jobs, incentives and pay perks but our university courses are designed in a way that they don't provide enough practical exposure and field work required for any decent job. Our course's structures are so theoretical, outdated and textbook oriented that they don't generate employment and that is the reason when young graduates are hired by any company, they first have to undergo professional training for first 5-6 months to learn about their work. Hence Quality Vocational Training is the need of the hour, if we really want to generate more jobs and enough employment. In the 21st Century, basic technology literacy is a skill that has become very crucial, be it in our homes or our workplaces and the same needs to be reflected in our schools. For anyone who has to join the workforce, basic technology literacy is absolutely necessary. Learning must be experimental and practical which

inculcates the skills of questioning, scrutinising and contemplating about our actions, decisions and experiences. This results in a discovery-led mindset that helps students effectively navigate and deal with uncertain conditions that may be laying ahead of them in life.

The Tragic Tale of Engineers

It is estimated that India produces around 1.5 million engineering graduates of which only 500,000 are absorbed into the market while the rest remain either unemployed or under-employed. This raises concerns about the quality of engineers being produced. The fourth edition of the National Employability Report for Engineers 2016, by Aspiring Minds (An employability evaluation and certification company) found that about 18 percent of engineers were employable for the software services sector. The rate in all other sectors – civil to mechanical was less than 7 percent. Despite, the obsession with engineering, 80% of engineers in India are unemployable, says the report. The report was based on a sample of more than 150,000 engineering students from 650 + engineering colleges who appeared for AMCAT (Aspiring Minds Computer Adaptive Test). According to a recent report by HT, campus recruitments at IITs which are considered sacred temples of engineering in India, have also taken a blow. The story reported on how campus hiring in IITs had fallen to 66 percent this year from last year's around 80 percent. Fuelled by middle and lower middle class ambitions of social mobility, every year, coaching institutes receive lakhs of students aspiring to become doctors and engineers. Parents spend a fortune to get their children into expensive coaching classes. They even take loans, sell their land or at times even move with them to other cities, all in the hope of getting their children into a reputed institute. And once that happens, college fees and living expenses further wring the parent's savings. But with this current data of even poster boys and girls of IITs not getting plethora of placements and opportunities, we really need to think and evaluate where we are going wrong. Our system seems to be producing zombies and robots, as in most of the schools students seemed to be spending majority of their time in preparing for competitive exams rather than enjoying the learning process and playing on field.

Stringent Need of Educational Reforms

There has to be an intense revision of the current syllabus and a culture of innovation that will feed more startups to create more jobs needs to be promoted. There are long needing reforms in regulatory bodies like UGC, AICTE and MCI as well as to ammend the current education policy. Education in India is often criticised for being based on rote learning and cramming rather than problem solving. In December 2016, then President Pranab Mukherjee had also expressed concern over employment generation saying that our country is witnessing jobless growth, lowest in the past 7 years. The country perhaps desperately needs to look beneath the surface to understand the problems that plague the education system and produce quality that matches and fuels country's shining growth story.

Youth Education is something which is central for development in today's time frame and is absolute for enhancement of the society and economy globally. Education is now defined as important for not only eradicating poverty and hunger but in promoting sustained, inclusive, multi-dimensional and

equitable economic growth by giving the self esteem and power to each and every individual of this society.

Education has a very broad prospective which is not just limited to making someone civilized, economically independent, broad minded, skilled, sharp, well – trained, socially well acceptable, and so on…..but it is about total transformation and empowerment of someone's personality on all the aspects to make a person much better, constructive and valuable resource for the society. Thus it is much more than mere textbooks or getting through one entrance exam. It's about the overall growth of an individual. We have to ensure that a student collaborates, is motivated, guides and facilitates others. Demonstrates a positive and practical approach and can also tackle problems well in life.

Boosting life skill development for life -long learning

The life – skill development needs to be done among students apart from bookish knowledge so that they can face real life challenges and problems with full confidence, patience and compassion. The role of a teacher becomes highly crucial in educating students about all these basic life skills and to show them right direction so that they can become better citizens of this society and more importantly a better human being. These life skills can make them innovative with original ideas and good observational skills, help to co-relate art with real life situations and impart the quality of life – long learning in them. It is also important to educate them about environment and social causes/shramdaan so that they are aware, sensitive and responsible for the noble causes, participate in environment related activities in schools, colleges and communities, be enthusiastic towards planning and organising activities for the betterment of nature and environment. They should be introduced to Literary & Creative Skills, Visual & Performing Arts so that they participate in literary and creative events at various levels such as debates, youth parliaments, book clubs, writing articles, stories, reviews, blogs and composing poems. They can also lean towards music, dance, instruments, drama, theatre, sculptures etc. for enjoying all art forms.

It is imperative to inculcate moral values among youth which become life long learning as a part of education. We can initiate by teaching them to respect all the fellow mates and people despite having differences in ideology or opinion. Making them express their ideas and opinions freely with classmates, at the same time being sensitive, kind and supportive towards everybody's emotional and religious feelings and beliefs, they should manage diversity well and be receptive to ideas and suggestions from all. We should help youth to be more self – confident, make them identify their strengths and weaknesses, encourage them to be empathetic and optimistic in life so that they can handle all adverse situations with great courage and can cope well with stress and challenges. We should teach them to accept defeat gracefully, take constructive criticism positively, accept feedback from elders and peer group for self improvement, exhibit interpersonal skills and become an effective communicator.

Moving ahead of Life skills, it is equally important to inculcate the value of sports, physical and health education among youth. Sports which teaches team spirit and determination is one of the most vital aspect of a healthy personality. Sports and fitness education not only teaches the students to maintain physical stamina, but also the habit of obedience, discipline, determination to succeed, co-ordination, team work, immense willpower, etc. Hence, the quality of sportsmanship needs to be built among youth.

Realising the Innate Potential of Our Youth

With 65% of our country's population below the age of 35 years, we all debate on Youth empowerment and giving more power to youth. But we need to realize the real idea behind the word 'EMPOWERMENT'. Youth empowerment is not just about creating good opportunities and different fields for today's youth or by providing them with all resources but it is also about making them realize their innate potential, capabilities as well as qualities and then supporting them financially, emotionally and psychologically on each and every aspect.

For instance, we all cribb, complain and sigh about our country's poor performance in Olympics everytime, for not securing enough medals. I just want to ask one simple question from all, that how many from us would be ready to support our children, brothers, sisters, siblings or known ones if they come out openly and ask for pursuing sports as a profession. The problem is that we all want to shine like 'Gold' medals but don't want to 'Burn'(work hard) like it. Everytime there are high expectations from our players only during Olympics or World Championships. But what are we doing rest of the time??? Nobody talks about them after the tournaments. We remember our players only during tournaments and forget that they need constant motivation, support, financial assistance and training.

Hence we really need to defy all the conventional notions of our bookish education system. We should stop restricting and confining ourselves with the traditional curriculum which has become a set mindset. (PCM = Engineer, PCB = Doctor, Arts = IAS Officer, Commerce = Banker or Businessman….WHY????????)

Rat race of just acquiring a valid college degree as a justification of proving oneself or as a symbol of self esteem or self validation must stop. It's time to realize the importance of Extra Curricular Activities (ECAs) & Sports and considering them as a career alternative too. With universities and many reputed colleges now giving admission to students through ECA & Sports Quota, why we are lagging behind in considering them as career options? It's totally cool if a child wants to be a dancer, a stand-up comedian, a photographer, an actor, a singer, a sportsman or any other profession he or she wants to pursue. If we can applaud kids on TV reality shows & movies then we should also be fine with our children opting for the same. Albert Einstein once said that "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by it's ability to climb a tree, then it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid". Hence the time has come to not just look this as a decorated quote but to actually understand it's meaning and implement it in real life.

Constantly comparing youngsters or their performances with their fellow mates will not only crush their self confidence and esteem but will also make them too much, self critical and demoralised. What they only need from you is a little compassion, belief, love and support. There should not be lack

of trust between the parents and children. At times of failure, proper healing , moral support and counselling needs to be done rather than a cold and harsh treatment. *Always remember that "Criticism like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a person's growth without destroying his roots."* When we allow our children to take their own decisions, fix their responsibilities for their actions and give them the freedom to express their views and opinions then they do unexpected wonders in life, which we would have never even imagined.

Understanding The Cognitive Mindset And Challenges Faced By Adolescents Today

It's the time to ensure the happiness, peace of mind and satisfaction among youth rather than pushing them in a ceaseless rat race. Many times we see parents and adults comparing the kids and adolescents of today's generation with their own time. This is completely illogical. Everything has changed today. The pressure of entrance exams, coaching, competition in admissions was not that rampant during their time as it is today. There was NO Internet, Social Media, 24X7 Messaging Apps, etc. during their times. There was no 24X7 exposure to the digital and cyber world that time. In this age of instant coffee, noodles and gratification, youth is not willing to wait patiently for anything. They are determined to get what their hearts are set on.

Today online addiction is the new source of mental disturbances. Categorised by experts as the dependence on technology like mobile phones, internet, online gaming and even pornography, online addiction is a behavioural problem like gambling. With online access and gaming getting cheaper, it is easy to get hooked on to the new window for entertainment. Unlike alcohol and tobacco de-addiction, there are no medicines or remedies for this case. With almost single families everywhere and both parents working, especially in metropolitan cities, where parents don't have much time to communicate with their child, how you can expect the things to be the same as they were 30 years back???

Due to loneliness, children develop mood swings, become angry and frustrated easily, become addictive towards wrong things and hampers their mental and physical health. This Loneliness in the long run becomes a habit and thus they stop interacting much with their parents, sharing their problems and prefer to stay alone without allowing much interference in their lives. The way this cyber world has drastically affected their minds can be analysed by the recent incidents of "Blue Whale Challenge Game" which created havoc on social media, the game which made many teens across the world to commit suicide. Thus, there is a need to shift discourse from the trigger, to address the underlying mental health vulnerabilities that are getting these children manipulated by an administrator who slowly works on strengthening dormant suicide ideation in someone with depression. The triggers vary but over the top reactions indicate underlying depression that drives them to extremes – both withdrawing into a self-destructive shell and loosing control over trivial issues.

Early Depression in Youth: A Case Study

With the advent of social networking sites, today online interactions have invaded the mainstream space and replaced the real emotions. Online interactions are far more superficial than interpersonal bonding and this makes people very lonely and depressed in the end. A 2016 study published in the Asian Journal of Psychiatry revealed that depression among university students is at an alarming 53%. India has one of the highest prevalence of mental illnesses in the world and the highest suicide rate among it's youth. The pressure to anyway succeed and to match the rhythm of this fast paced world is proving fatal. Recently, a 17 year old girl aspiring to be a doctor from rural Andhra Pradesh hanged herself at her Hyderabad hostel. Samyuktha, who had scored 95% in class 12 and enrolled at a coaching institute to prepare for her entrance, left a note behind, which mentioned the growing pressure of expectations. Last month, unable to tolerate the jibes of his teachers, another 17 year old student in Andhra jumped off a building. In the coaching hub of Kota (Rajasthan), where 175,000 students go every year dreaming of clearing engineering and medical entrances, a hostel association has installed 'suicide-proof' fans in the student's rooms, in a short-sighted move to address the grave problem without going into the root cause. The 2016 National Crime Record Bureau data said that at least 17 students committed suicide in Kota owing to the fear of failure. Earlier this year, in April, the HRD ministry had written to states asking them to regulate these private coaching institutions, expressing concern over the spate of suicides. Also speaking at the launch of the second edition of Smart India Hackathon 2018, organised at the College of Engineering, Pune, the Union HRD Minister, Prakash Javadekar said, "It is a cause of worry…Students from Class VIII become slaves of these coaching institutes. They are being taught to only face competitive exams. The coaching institutes are promoting rote learning and not imparting actual knowledge to the students."

Spending quality time with family and friends provides emotional and social support but with virtual interactions replacing interpersonal friendships, coping skills get compromised and youth find itself alienated in both real as well as virtual world. You must have noticed that people who interact so much on the social media sometimes don't even bother to say 'Hii' when they meet face to face in the real world. They roll their eyes from each other to prevent any direct communication when they meet in personal. This indicates a lack of self confidence and self esteem. I don't know why it is difficult to talk with someone even if that person is not a close friend or is just an acquaintance? If you can like or comment on his/her post on Facebook and even chat with that acquaintance on social networking apps. Then why it's so difficult for you to just approach him/her, say 'Hii' and start a conversation?

Most people identify only sadness and crying with depression and do not think irritability, mood swings, anger, change in behaviour, falling grades, sleeplessness and withdrawal from society are also alarming signs of early depression. Even those who recognise symptoms don't know where or who to visit because of the attached social stigma. Other than emotional pain and suffering, studies suggest that depression also puts people in the danger of self-destructive behaviour, unsafe sex, teenage pregnancy, druge abuse, excessive smoking and drinking and even suicide in extreme cases. In a run-up to the World Health day, PM Modi also underlined the need to bring depression out of the closet in his Mann Ki Baat on March 26,

2017 he said, "We are afraid to talk about it (depression) openly. Suppression of depression is not good. Expression is good. If depressed, share your feelings with others, it will make you feel better."

Hence not just at educational level but healing needs to be done at mental & emotional level to prevent youngsters from undergoing depression and this is what the purpose of Life – Skill Development among youth.

Imparting Life Skills: A Remedy

Life skills have been defined by the WHO as "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". They represent the psycho-social skills that determine valued behaviour and include reflective skills such as critical thinking, presence of mind and problem solving to personal skills such as self-awareness and to interpersonal skills. Practicing Life – skills leads to qualities such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, to take action and bring change and capabilities to have freedom to decide what to do and who to be. But sadly our today's education system is not at all paying attention to develop these Life – skills among youth. One should develop inner richness of personality on the highest moral plane, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, ethnic, racial and other differences.

And ofcourse your will also needs to be equally strong as the skill. While it is the skill that makes you competent enough to perform activities you wish to do, but it is the will that ultimately determines how far you go in life. Someone with great skill and no will is destined to rot away. But someone with average talent/skill and a strong will has the potential to become great. The will to succeed makes them put in thousands of hours of practice to polish their skills and eventually their skill becomes as extra-ordinary as their will.

As rightly said by Steve Jobs "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinion drown out your inner voice. And most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.

Everything else is secondary." This is a powerful message which highlights the need to have one's own identity and opinion. To have your own stand and raise your voice for the things which matter to you in life. If you have to go out of your way to gain the approval of someone by completely changing who you are and loosing your self identity, then it's high time you ask yourself, if it's worth being in association with that someone. Seeking anyone's approval shows lack of self – confidence. It's time we realise that such pretendence won't take us anywhere. We need to first learn to accept and love ourselves for who we are. Ofcourse, there is always a need of improvement in every person and certain bad habits which a person wish to change, but the identity and self – worth of a person needs to be preserved and shouldn't be changed for anyone.

Taking your life decisions based on what others say will give you the biggest regret in life. There is no doubt that others can offer valuable advice which might be helpful, but the problem is when they force their decisions on you, decisions that can change the course of your life tremendously. Compromising on your life goals for the sake of other people around will only harbour intense anger, resentment and regret in the long run. Keep this in mind, that even if you fail when you take your own decisions, atleast it will never lead to resentment because whatever you chose to do was your own decision. On the other hand, if you live a life dictated by others you slowly will grow to hate and resent even the people you love. You will put the blame of your failures on them.

Many times in our lives we are crumpled and thrown into dirt because of difficult circumstances. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you must remember that you will never loose your value. You are special. Do not let circumstances define who you are. Remember it's the toughest time which will either break you or make you. And at last, I would conclude by saying that "An optimistic person finds oppurtunities in difficulties where as a pessimistic person finds difficulties in oppurtunities."

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