

Higher Education & Challenges

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Abstract: Higher education today is facing many challenges; it hasn't been successful in achieving its target of preparing young men and women for life as well as for a profession. The reason probably is imbalance in what industry aspires to see in young graduates and what colleges/ universities prepare them for. This imbalance cannot be resolved unless there is university and industry partner-ship and goals are set, accordingly. In addition to that, we need to combine formal education along with skill sets which are necessary for getting jobs. Vocational education shall be mandatory post Highersecondary education and in doing so local needs and opportunities available shall be taken into consideration. At college level there is need of skilling students which implies providing the skills necessary for securing a job and simultaneously, aiming at holistic development which includes physical ability, interpersonal skills, emotional quotient, effective communication skills and other cognitive skill. This is also in keeping with the skills envisaged in new education policy. In order to achieve this, entire education system needs to be overhauled right from syllabus framing, its implementation, teacher training, quality of teaching and making all stake holders responsible for their role and ensuring active student participation. Summarily, focus needs to shift from pedagogy to practical approach and hands on learning.

Key words: Emotional quotient, skilling India, interpersonal skills, pedagogy and cognitive skills.

I. Introduction

Education today has lost its track and failed in its purpose of preparing young men and women for life and for a profession. Rising unemployment, resultant frustration, stress and depression seeping in young lives is a fact enough to prove this fact. Education is something we all are passionate about but it seems today's dominant formal education is a broken system based on antiquated paradigms. There has been lot of debates and public discourses but some of the issues are still knotted- mainly kind of education to be imparted to make a person successful individual and a successful professional with a meaningful and gainful employment. Though lot of water has flown down the bridge since the time we set our educational goals post- independent era but certain things still need a serious and critical consideration.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

According to Aristotle the great philosopher and thinker, **Education is the creation of sound mind in a sound body.**

Kautilya, the great economist was of the opinion that **Education shall prepare men for country and shall help develop love for the nation.** More than any other time, today, we need to hotly pursue this objective of education to prepare young men and women who are tough, desire to develop their individual personality, search for knowledge with a desire to serve the nation.

According to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, **education that was deeply rooted in one's immediate surroundings but connected to the culture of the wider world, predicted upon pleasurable learning and individualised to the personality of child.**

This definition highlights two very important aspect of education:

- A. Education shall be imparted keeping in mind the immediate surroundings and their needs but shall also be connected to the culture of wider world.
- B. The system of imparting teaching shall be pleasurable and shall suit individual needs.

Highlighting the importance of education Mahatma Gandhi stated,:

Education certainly is a means of all round progress of man. In other words the pathway to human development goes through the lanes of education. Moreover true education is sole basis of achieving one's purpose in life. In this definition while the focus is on education for all for the development of mankind but the emphasis is on need for individual approach to achieve their goals.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, architect of modern India has to state the following about the role and function of education:

The aim and function of education should be to see that the teaching carried on is suited to adult; that it is scientific, detached and impartial in character; that it aims not so much at filling the mind of students with facts or theories as at calling forth his own individuality, and stimulating him to mental efforts that it accustoms him to the critical study of the leading authorities, with perhaps occasional reference to first-hand information that implants in his mind a standard of toughness and gives him a sense of difficulty as well as the value of reaching at truth.

Some of the key points as enumerated in the above definition are:

- A. The teaching should be suited to adults,
- B. The approach should be scientific, impartial and detached,
- C. It should not fill the minds of students with theories and facts rather should draw on their individuality leading to finding truth which toughens them for life.

Clark Kerr an economist with a historian's sensibility has coined an interesting term 'multiversity' in 1960s and examined the role of university as a living organism of socio-political thought and activity and remarked, what the railroads did for the first half of the last century and automobiles did for the first half of this century may be done for the second half of this century by knowledge industry: and that is to serve as the focal point for the national growth. Probably, late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi shared the same vision and established knowledge commission under the chairman ship of Sam Pitroda which led to a revolution in India in terms of computerization and digitization.

This brings us closer to the true concept of education which ought to be pupil –centric suiting to their innate abilities to blossom helping them develop a sound body and a sound mind which is instrumental in achieving personal and professional growth and in turn is conducive for the growth of society and nation. So I, assume whatever we are trying to focus on in present times was already enshrined by great educationalist and philosophers in the past. Now the question arises what went wrong? I presume by providing en mass higher education to large number of students without tracking how many of them can be absorbed in a particular industry and without raising their employability quotient has led to a crisis situation. By stating so, I don't imply that education shouldn't be provided to masses but it shall be provided keeping in mind the industry needs and the aptitude of students so that they are job ready.

1. Education Scenario in India

In order to understand higher education scenario in India, we need to refer to education polices framed from time to time for the purpose.

1.1. Education Policies in India

1.1.1. National Education Policy in India was first drawn by the govt. of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru under the chairmanship of Education minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and the focus was on education for all.

1.1.2. Kothari Commission for education was formed (1964- 1968), its report when published emphasised the following points:

- A Compulsory and free education for all children below the age of fourteen
- B Implementation of three language formula
- C Primary education to be imparted in regional language.

Under the govt. of Late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi an autonomous body NCERT was constituted to draft education policy, devise syllabus, decide pattern of competitive exams and impart training to teachers so that uniform pattern of education can be ensured at the national level. On the same lines another important body UGC was formed to set guidelines for the college/university education including framing of rules regarding teachers appointment- qualifications, different significant bodies as well as recommendations for pay scales and formulating student admission process.

1.1.3. The above policy was modified by Late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1992 where the thrust was on technology and its application, overcoming gender and caste disparity in education thereby promoting women education and providing scholarships to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes.

1.1.4. Latest education policy is drawn under the tutelage of Prime Minister NarendraModi in 2016 and the thrust is on skilling India. The key points of the policy are:

- A. Make education affordable for all and free education for girls.
- B. Develop world class skilled work force- strengthen higher education - industry partnership.
- C. Flexible education which serves a student's need to work and study.
- D. Holistic education which ensures literacy, life skills and employability.
- E. Life- long learning, so no student ends his/ her education due to lack of funds.

Indeed new education policy has set forth very lofty goals before nation but it can be successful only if we pay attention to implementation and applicability of it/ part of it. The component which is of crucial importance is

the dynamic syllabus and its implementation. Keeping these objectives in mind, I submit heres some of the suggestions which can help overcome major hurdles on the road to success in achieving these goals.

II. Suggestions

All those challenges withstanding, the biggest challenge before any institution is how to keep students interested in classroom teaching. While it is true that lecturers and lectures both are indispensable part of higher education, in the current scenario there is a need to bring about a change in both – the lecturer's approach towards teaching and contents of lecture and how it should be delivered so that students don't feel that their minds are being filled with the information which either they already know or don't care to know. It is true every year we are producing large number of graduates, engineers and doctors, but many of them lack the skills which the employer are looking for, in short even after graduation they are unemployable. This topic had been debated in the past also that there needs to be a coordination between education policy and needs of industry but in new education policy P. M. Modi has given lot of focus to skilling students so that they can be readily absorbed in the industry. Some industries and public sector enterprises have come forward and have started working in the direction of providing skills to students but I firmly believe that it need not be done after a student finishes his/her graduation rather it shall be integrated in the syllabus itself and its implementation shall start immediately after higher secondary.

Another important aspect which needs serious consideration of the educationists is syllabus. Most of the problems which we witness today is due to old, out dated and monotonous syllabus and equally old and out dated and hackneyed methods of teaching largely consisting of lectures which students hardly find challenging or mentally stimulating. Whatever we teach students, its ultimate aim is to prepare students for a future profession- develop confidence and competence so that they are job ready. Here I would like to mention that we require two types of skills- one forming the foundation of every career and the other which are necessary for a specific job. According to a recent Times Of India report the basic skills which are necessary for success in any profession are reading, writing and listening skills which are of paramount importance and lead to better comprehension and presentation abilities. Another set of skills which are necessary for success in a profession are in depth knowledge of subject and its practical application in diverse fields, in short one ought to have multidisciplinary approach.

In order to help students acquire these skills, we need to modify our teaching methods. It is said we cannot cut a diamond with a blunt blade, similarly, we cannot achieve our target if our own mind set is rigid and we are not adapt to change. At this stage all teachers who are making an entry in this field now or the ones who have years of experience- both need to undergo training which will prepare them for challenges ahead. Training can be modelled on the following lines:

A. Redefine the Role and Function of teacher: Teachers as facilitators, besides teaching and finishing syllabus and evaluating them, a teacher has to play the role of a mentor within the class room and outside the class room.

B. Skilling Teachers: Surveys and various news reports published from time to time about teachers inefficiency leave us in no doubt that there is a dire need of providing training to teachers on how to make lectures interesting, meaningful and participatory.

C. Innovative Teaching Methods: There is a need to use innovative teaching methods such as quiz, puzzles, role play, dialogue, and debate and group discussion.

D. Assessment Tools: New assessment tools such as peer- assessment and assessment of selected projects by industry and other innovative assessment tools need to be put in place. But teachers alone cannot bring about these changes unless he/ she is provided with the conditions and environment conducive for achieving these lofty goals.

First and foremost it is important that class size is reduced so that it is feasible for a teacher to engage students in interactive teaching. Being in teaching field for nearly three decades, I am fully aware of all the bottlenecks which operate in this field. Reducing classsize implies employing more teachers for which Govt. sanction is required which is hard to come by, due to financial burden on the Govt. while more allocations of funds for higher education are required, in the meantime we have to manage with existing resources. Here I would suggest that each college can conduct a small survey among its students to find out who intend to take up teaching as a career in future. These students of final year bachelor degree can assist teachers in conducting and implementing such programmes. This will work both ways- providing help to colleges to overcome the problem of shortage of staff and providing these young aspiring students with valuable teaching experience. The extra hours are put by students, can be rewarded with extra credits or it can be treated as project for which marks can be assigned.

Another important hurdle in implementing these suggestions is inadequate time allotted to teachers for teaching. In college set up everything is driven by examination which in fact adversely affects teaching and learning process. In addition to that in India teachers are assigned various administrative responsibilities including election responsibilities, this needs to be avoided and in case it is very necessary to assign administrative tasks

to teachers then they should be granted remission in lectures- to ensure that quality of teaching is not compromised. In my opinion, these tasks can also be assigned to young unemployed graduates. This will not only provide them employment but will also present them an opportunity for hands on learning. Though it seems an uphill task, it is not impossible to achieve. While it holds true that the most important responsibility of a teacher is to teach as per syllabus within the stipulated time frame but this apart a teacher shall hold meeting with students in order to understand what are their needs and expectations from a particular course how these can be achieved so that one of the objectives of New Education Policy i.e. to ensure literacy, life skills and employability can be met. Now the big question is what shall constitute as part of 'skilling students. Undoubtedly, when we think of skilling students the two most important things which cross our mind are professional skills and communication skills to put across your thoughts to people who want to use your skills in a given set up, preferably industrial/ organizational setup. while first is acquired to a large extent by studying professional courses, same can't be said about the later. Though universities have tried to integrate the same by introducing a paper on communication skills along with arts and technology based courses but their course content, implementation and students apathy for such courses, all combined together leaves much to be desired. Recently, The Times of India carried an article whereby author insisted that the most desirable skills sought by employers are reading, speaking, listening and comprehension abilities. I fully endorse this viewpoint and agree that our courses shall be designed around developing these four skills in the students by the time they graduate. True but there is no magic wand to develop these skills. It can't be achieved just by introducing a paper on Communication Skills in the end semester. Here I would suggest that this should be a graded courses right from semester one till the end of degree, each semester devoted to developing a particular skill in students and focus should be on activity based learning through tutorials e .g. first semester can be devoted to only reading and recitation of different type of material and second for reproducing it through different activities like dialogue writing skit and performing it before a group henceforth increasing the level of difficulty, so that by the end semester students are able to speak well, listen, comprehend and relate to others and respond which will help them perform well in group discussions and do equally well at job interviews.

To achieve all these desirable but lofty objectives, we will have to recalibrate all the constituents of education system right from Govt. policies, educational authorities, management, syllabus makers, students and their parents and make fair implementation of these training based programmes. In the process most important role will be played by the teachers, not only will they have to undergo training on how to incorporate these basic ideas into other subjects and make these relevant across disciplines while understanding needs of students, their competency level as well as maintain their excitement and interest element and finally relate it to industry needs and make them job ready.

Following activities can be conducted during tutorials only by changing our approach and attitude:

- A. Reading, recitation and listening exercises.
- B. Role Play, skit and quiz competition.
- C. Delivering a talk, dialogue, debate and speech.
- D. Making presentation and news reading

Care has to be taken that these exercises start with elementary level then gradually difficulty level needs to be increased.

III. Conclusion

Today education is undergoing a process of churning and reshuffling in all aspects. Traditional and modern approaches are merging. There is vast chasm between rural and urban education scene, there are govt. run schools as well as privately managed international schools, and soare mobile schools run under a bridge or in some small shanties. Unless we decide oncore aspects of our education system and try to implement it in all areas rural/urban, city/ international schools, we will not be able to achieve true aim of education. According to me the core value of our education shall be based on the following:

- A. Making students job ready according to industry needs
- B. Making students responsible and sensitive to socially relevant issues
- C. Training them to be good citizens
- D. Readying them to face competition from global forces

These objectives can be achieved by taking following measures:

A. Common and progressive Syllabus across all Boards/ Universities

Common syllabus across all boards is the urgent need of the hour so that the process of uniform education to all can be initiated same is applicable to universities. It will also help in ensuring uniform quality of education leading to better standards of education so that student can cope with competition and rural urban divide is also bridged to some extent.

B. Increased budgetary allocation for research into syllabus framing and its implementation.

Government, Public bodies, and Private trusts should come together, identify needs and redesign syllabus and pool their resources and existing human capital and put them to best use. The best talent from all bodies can be sent across on rotation basis for training.

C. Provision of funds for Training of Teachers/Train The Trainer program [TTT]

This is one aspect which needs thorough analysis and support from all quarters. Due to various constraints, all the teachers cannot be sent for training, only selected few can be trained keeping in mind their ability to further train their colleagues. Besides they can also act as resource person for those institutes who couldn't send their teachers for training. Another important point is timeliness of such training. It needs to be conducted by experts in the field and shall be conducted well in advance so that all constituents can get benefited from training

D. Digital Education

Another aspect which we have not yet fully utilized is the area of digital education, intensified efforts are needed to cover the vast number of students who desire to pursue education but do not have sufficient means or opportunity to enrol in regular courses. Highlighting the vast arena and scope of digital education which can help overcome many hurdles and minimize the cost of education, Anya Kamentez commented:

The promise of free or marginal cost open source content, techno hybridization, unbundling of educational experiences & path is too powerful to ignore...

These suggestions along with new thinking infused through new education policy will certainly be able to put India on global map in terms of quality education along with employability quotient which by now is questionable by the industries and India would enjoy enviable reputation as we had in the healthcare sector.

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