

School education: How to tackle future challenges?



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Two-thirds of the present-day primary school students will, somewhere down the line, be employed in the new sectors which we know nothing about and which are not in vogue at all now. For today's digital technologies including Artificial Intelligence are growing rapidly, raising the question on how to prepare today's students for the future. Hence, no wonder, several countries are paying more attention to school education. We, on our part, have to take the initiative to implement several measures in the school education sector.

Change and growth

After science broke free of the clutches of religion, the industrial revolution arose at the end of the 18th century and in the 19th century, creating in its wake scores of jobs. Education in sync with the changes was designed and made common to all. The new education system was crafted in such a way that expertise was achieved in mathematics and science. At the same time,

democracy spread all over the world. Consequently, in order to benefit the people, investments were made in social welfare. It was considered that investments made in education would pave the way for equality among the people. The perspective still holds good even today.

That is why several educationists have pointed out that investments made in school education will have a long-term impact on the overall society.

We have seen them vindicated in the past centuries in Tamil Nadu. Our government has been implementing schemes to provide free lunch, free bicycles, laptops, and so on in order to wean the students to school. As a result, Tamil Nadu is now front and center in education growth. While admissions to government schools are going on in full swing, the question has also arisen now: Will the education system existing for the past two centuries be relevant to the future?

Beyond the syllabus

In the changing environment, changes are needed in the school education system. There is now a need to deviate from the marks-oriented system and construct a new one that helps enhance knowledge and skills. Ganesh Gopal, running a software company in India and in the U.S., in an interaction, conveyed a very important message. He said that an engineering graduate, who had been a topper, failed miserably in a job interview where a non-engineering graduate easily came through. The latter's success was attributed to his self-thinking faculty, creativity, and imaginative power.

It is imagination that sets man apart from other creatures on this planet. Yuval Noah Harari says in his book 'Sapiens' that it is an imaginative skill – presenting as a fiction to fellow human beings whatever man thinks up – which has made man a unique creature.

Education does not spell just cramming the children's brains with lots of information which is just a tool to stimulate their knowledge. The role of teachers in this regard is quite important and immense.

The importance of teachers

Finland is at the forefront in school education in the world. The country has earned this distinction in 40 years through its technique-oriented schemes. Becoming a professional teacher in that country is hardly a cakewalk. A prospective teacher must get a degree from one of the eight universities and must be well-trained in the complex syllabus. Above all, the teacher aspirant must have a deep understanding of child psychology.

Tamil Nadu can take a leaf out of Finland's book in education. Teacher education must be given as much importance as medicine and engineering courses. Every year the teacher trainees' functioning must be subjected to scrutiny. It must be ascertained if they have updated their teaching methods according to the changing needs of the times. They must be given unflinching training. Large funds must be earmarked in the budget for education which must be spread all over the state in such a way that all can access it. When the standard of government schools goes up, making education available free of cost to all, every student's economic burden will get reduced by Rs.50,000 to Rs. one lakh. The private schools' dominance will also be curtailed. Importantly, the students will switch from the CBSE to the state board syllabus.

Instead of enforcing the universal syllabus for the whole of the state, the schools themselves, under the general guidance, can design their own syllabi according to the region-specific needs. As the UNESCO report 2016 said categorically that education in mother tongue is best, the idea must be implemented to the core.

When learning sheds its usual feature of being individual training and becomes a community effort, the students can cultivate special skills and exhibit their talents.

Duties of Government

The physical as well mental health of school children is vital. A mechanism must be in place for the government hospital doctors to visit the schools regularly to examine the students. As the datasets concerning the students of all schools are available with the government, it must be scientifically found out which subjects the students, entering into class 7, have set their sights on. Then, they must be trained in the subjects of their choice. There must be a statistical compilation of the students' interests and choices such as engineering, medicine, economics, arts and science, and so on. Thanks to the fabulous growth of software, to attain knowledge in all

these subjects is nowadays very easy. When datasets and information on job opportunities available in all sectors are collated into a great database, the students accessing it will know which sectors will suit them and pursue their courses accordingly. This can avoid a large number of students' mad rush into the most favorite sector and the mad pursuit of a single subject.

If all these initiatives are taken now to set right our education system in a decade, we can produce a great number of students competent enough to tackle new challenges.

Translated by V. Mariappan.