

# Education in India in Retrospect: Some Reflections

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*“The one thing that we have to work on as a country is our human capital; if we can get that right everything will fall in place” - Harish Manwani, COO, Unilever*

## Introduction

Education refers to the wealth of knowledge acquired by an individual after studying a particular subject matter or experiencing life lessons that provide an understanding of something. It is not merely studying and getting good marks but a means to discover new things which we don't know about and increase our knowledge. So an educated person has the ability to differentiate between right and wrong and good and evil. Education has a key role to play in the economic growth of a country. Numerous studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between education and development. Theodore Schultz, a Nobel prize-winning economist, was the first one to systematize “how investments in education can affect productivity in agriculture as well as the economy as a whole”.

The recently published speaking picture of relatives and friends of Bihar's SSC exam candidates scaling great heights to 'help' their wards reflects the ills of the system of education to a large extent. The education system in India is presently geared towards testing knowledge at every level, as opposed to imparting vital

skills. Ambitious curriculum, unrelated to the target child's learning ability, is among the significant factors behind poor learning outcomes in schools across the country.

## Status of Education in India

The International PISA [2012] report ranked our Class 10 children 73rd in the world out of 74 countries and the Wipro-EI Quality Education Study said that students in our top private schools were learning more poorly in 2010 than 2006. Annual Status of Education Report [ASER], which is based on a survey conducted by NGO Pratham, the largest annual household survey of school children in rural India focusing on status of schooling and basic learning, also painted a sad picture of the learning scenario in rural India.

The key findings of ASER Survey 2014, 10th annual report on education which covered 577 districts, 16,497 villages and surveyed 570,000 children between 3 to 16 in 340,000 households with 15,026 government schools, are as under:

- Pedagogic system of instruction - a failure

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- Overemphasis on curriculum geared only to exam. results
- Only 48.1% of Class V children in rural India can read Class II level text
- Pupils from higher classes cannot do division or subtraction
- Percentage of children who can read Std. II text is low
- Reading skills among rural school children declines in all States except Tamil Nadu
- Only 1/4th of children in Class III can read Class II text fluently.

India is going to experience a paradox of nearly 90 million people joining the workforce, but most of them will lack requisite skills and the mindset for productive employment, according to a report. India has about 550 million people aged less than 25 years, of which only 11% are enrolled in tertiary institutions, compared to the world average of 23%. Now coming to the higher education, it is distressing to know that India failed to find a mention in the top 100 list of universities, according to the *2015 World Reputation Rankings by Times Higher Education (THE) magazine*. As many as 21 countries made it to the list, with the US' Harvard University grabbing the top slot. UK's University of Cambridge coming second, and the University of Oxford moving up to the third position.

### What Ails Higher Education?

In the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2014-15, not a single university from India could make it to the list of top 275 universities in the world and no Indian institute for engineering and technology

figures in the list of top 100 universities for that category. It is really shocking for a country that boasts of having more number of engineering institutions and producing more number of engineers than any other country in the world, does not have a single world-class university?

### Spending on Education too Low

The spending on education at present is abysmally low at 3 per cent of GDP. India has one of the youngest populations in the world and effective investment in education will determine how well the population is educated and this in turn will enhance the productivity of the demographic dividend. As rightly said by Chairman of HDFC, Deepak Parekh "aggressive" investments by the government as well as corporate in the education sector is a must as it is the key to unlock India's demographic dividend.

### Narrow View of Education

**Skills acquiring approach (West) versus a knowledge acquiring approach (India):** While the education system in the West fosters "out-of-the-box thinking," India's educational system is concerned about *raising the pass percentage* and the student and their parents are only concerned about good grades. As a result, the system continues to produce graduates who lack the skills employers look for. Recently, the CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt announced that India's entrepreneurs have the "*ability to build the next Google if India plays its cards right*".

### Need to Update Curriculum

Our curricula, with the emphasis on content and the neglect of higher-order thinking

skills, do not help students become creative and critical thinkers.

### **Commercialization**

The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy's [NIPFP] study has identified private education as one of the sources of black money. Naturally the educational institutions that glorify mediocrity and mint money will never be interested in improving quality or aim to become a top-class institute of higher education.

### **Appointments to key positions are not based on merit**

It is a well-known secret that Vice-Chancellors are appointed at the instance of the political establishment. As rightly said by Kapil Sibal, former Union Minister for HRD, at the inauguration of the Vice-Chancellors' conference in New Delhi a few years ago, "If we really want our system to thrive, then the academic world should be left free to its own devices in the hope that you create a future for the country."

### **Obsession with IT industry**

It is distressing to note that even bright students who have excelled in non-IT fields join IT companies and bid goodbye to their areas of specializations, which is not a healthy trend.

### **Over emphasis on Academic Qualifications**

Over emphasis on Academic Qualifications by UGC has resulted in a number of university teachers registering for Ph.D. programmes. It is not passion for research but passion for

climbing up the career ladder in the form of promotion that motivates teachers to register for Ph.D. As a result, the quality of most Ph.D research is turning out to be sub-standard.

### **No tie-ups**

Effective university-industry collaboration paves the way for innovation. Ties with world-class universities and industry can open the gates of opportunities for students, scholars and academics to collaborate with the scholars of the foreign universities in various research projects. Not much is happening in this regard.

### **Failure of Regulator**

One of the first committees set up by HRD Minister Smriti Irani to review the working of the University Grants Commission (UGC) has said the regulator has not only "failed to fulfill its mandate but also has not been able to deal with emerging diverse complexities" and should be replaced by a National Higher Education Authority. The two-volume report submitted to the ministry says UGC has side-stepped its "function of being a sentinel of excellence in education and embraced the relatively easier function of funding education".

### **Value Based Education**

Research shows that children develop academic diligence when they are involved with a Values-based school. From the social perspective, Values-based Education promotes effective learning and underpins the continuous improvement of personal, social, moral and economic wellbeing.

## Why Values are so important in Education?

In today's world, teaching values to our youth is more important than ever. From the moment they are born, children are extremely impressionable. They begin to form their opinion and view of the world before they even hit their adolescence. As parents and educators, we are children's biggest and number one influences; and it is our responsibility to teach our youth about core values so they may grow up to be caring, confident and respectful adults.

**Firstly**, since students spend a majority of their time at school, it should be a place that supports families' and communities' efforts to establish strong values in students.

**Secondly**, educators should be tasked with the job of helping children see that values are not only an important part of the educational process but also to their overall development as an individual.

**Thirdly**, if we expect our youth to respect others, we must also show respect; whatever values you wish to instill, you must be willing to represent yourself.

**Fourthly**, we all must foster an environment, where core values are a focal point that enables students to logically grapple with the moral life and encourages healthy brain development and growth.

### Conclusion:

Education is a necessary tool for national progress, human empowerment and social change. Further, the demographic dividend can either be a fortuitous economic opportunity or a missed chance, depending on how the Government deploys the huge emerging

workforce in to the productive streams of economic activity. Liberalization and economic growth have brought about undeniable improvements in the lives of Indians. But for India, it's certainly worth considering whether simply continuing on its current path of reform and economic advancement will allow the country to make up for China's early lead in health, education and development.



### Ancient Indian Universities... Unparalleled Even Till date

The term 'University' as used in ancient times meant a centre where higher education was imparted to the aspiring students. Though it has distant similarity with the modern Universities, a number of features in these Universities find no parallel in our modern education under this name.

The oldest amongst the Universities in ancient Bharat, is Takshasila (1000 B.C to 500 AD). Though it was well known since 700 B.C., its activities started a few centuries earlier.

The University was one of its kind. There was nothing by way of co-ordination of the work done by the teachers nor was there any external authority, like a king who would govern them. Each teacher was an institution and enjoyed full autonomy in his work. Takshasila became the centre for higher education because several teachers who were recognised as authorities in their respective subjects resided there.

At that time the education began at home and the students got their secondary education in the Ashrams. Takshasila thus was the intellectual capital of Bharat.

- "Awakening Indians to India"  
- Chinmaya Yuva Kendra publication.