SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE 21st CENTURY: CHALLENGES, REQUIREMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

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Abstract

In the twenty first century, with the advent of new and rapid information and communication technology and its easy access to students, they are now expose to vast pool of knowledge but easy access to technology does not guarantee better learning unless the teachers adjust the classroom learning practices according to the need of the hour. The learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contents and culture in which students learn. The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class- its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and react to each other - as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning. With the emergence of new global movement calling for new models of teaching learning, formal education should be transform to enable new forms of learning that is needed to tackle complex global challenges. The paper attempts to explore how the school learning climate can be prepared and enhanced for the future to facilitate teaching learning process and mold students having diverse abilities and competencies such as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking etc. A discussion on the requirements and challenges of such learning climate having futuristic goals in India will also be done.

Keywords - school learning environment

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is the era of technological advancements. In this era with rapid growth of information and communication technologies, a revolutionary change has been brought in each and every aspect of our lives. The area of education is also not left untouched with this. With new advancements, the concept of traditional classrooms has narrowed and a new form of learning has emerged. Today, the knowledge of the student is not restricted only to the textbooks and conventional teaching- learning process, rather an arena of information has opened up for the students. But mere access to ICT does not guarantee better learning unless the teachers adjust the classroom learning practices to the need of the present hour as well as the future needs.

Thus, in the modern age when technology has pervaded each and every aspect of our lives the concept of traditional classrooms is being redefined. The role of teachers is also being transformed from, merely being a transmitter of knowledge, to being a guide and a facilitator, setting up the classroom learning environment

i.e.; the activities, materials, managing between the traditional and modern methods of learning; keeping in mind the children's perceived needs and interests and encouraging children for new exciting ideas and experiences.

"Learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. Since students may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-school locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to classroom, which has more limited and traditional connotations—a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example.

The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class—its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another—as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning…."

-The glossary of educational reforms

India is a developing country and the world's second most populated country. So in order to convert our population into useful human resources it becomes crucial that planning of educational policies should be done very meticulously so as to prepare skilled human resources equipped with skills for future sustainability.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE FUTURE

As already discussed above, the purpose of education is not just to fulfill the present needs of students but also to prepare them for the future. Thus it becomes utmost important that the planning of the education should be done in a proper way. Here are some of the areas which need to be focused upon to make our education system forward looking and future oriented:

i) Individualized Learning : Based on the Piagetian concept that the child should be the chief agent in his/her own education and that each child develops or learn in his/her own unique way, the learning should become more individualized. Although, it is an important aspect of psychology of education but in reality it is still not brought into practice. Our whole education system is centered round curriculum and teachers. All students are treated in the same way thus they do not reach their optimum potential. Thus a learner centered approach is most important requirement for the future addressing the child's individual needs and helping his/ her all round development in true manner.

ii) Pedagogy and Teacher Training: With the availability of wide range of knowledge on internet and various other means, the responsibility of teachers has also increased. Teachers need to adjust their classroom practices to include scaffolding of skills, understanding and knowledge of an increased range of texts. This requires teachers to plan for learning across a range of texts and large processes in the electronic medium to assist in the development of a multilateral individual. Teachers need to model the purposeful use

of ICT in order for students to develop multi literacy practices including creating electronic texts. Schools should offer training for new technologies so that teachers know how to work on their curriculum.

iii) Infrastructure and Technology: The schools should be equipped with modern and state-of-the-art technologies and the infrastructure should also be sustainably developed. It should meet the needs of the students making a conducive environment for learning and thus helping them in their overall development. Reimaging a curriculum and making technology a part of it, not changing the teaching learning process but complementing what teachers are already doing, the learning environment should reflect the real world. A collaboration between teachers, students and IT Department of the schools should be emphasized to bridge the gap of ignorance.

iv) Policies and Curriculum Development: There is an urgent need to rethink and redefine the present curriculum and accordingly make policies for education. The education should be more personalized keeping in mind that each student has different learning patterns and it should be nurtured accordingly to make them global learners. Technology should be embedded in each aspect of education from learning to evaluation, and management but sustainability should not be neglected. Capacity building programmes for teachers and principals should be there.

v) Outward-looking Social Trends: The education policies should be in tune with the ideas, philosophies and trends prevalent in the contemporary times. It should reflect the social ethos and cultural beliefs present in the society but at the same time it should be futuristic as well to make them adjust easily to the future needs and demands.

CHALLENGES TO BE FACED

In a country like ours, preparing a conducive learning environment for future is not an easy task, especially when we being a developing nation with a massive population lack resources, skilled manpower, etc. Each and everything has to be managed very wisely so as to derive the maximum out of the minimum. Some challenges that can be encountered in present India for preparing future ready schools are:

1) Striking a balance between Global and Local: Today in the era of globalisation, our competition is not only within a class, but we are competing at a global level. A student in a remote village is a competition for a child in any metropolitan city. If focus is given only on local level then students will be left out of the competition from the rest of the world and if only global education is concentrated then students will be unaware of the local needs. Thus, it becomes a challenging task to manage our curriculum which makes our student ready to compete at a global level and at the same time it should also make students aware of the problems of one's own region. The motto of think globally and act locally should be followed.

2) Striking a balance between Formal and Informal Learning: The learning style of today's generation has become different. Their learning is limited not only from books but a vast and expansive area of

knowledge and information is available to them. They are learning through various techniques and latest technologies. To make the teaching learning process more effective emphasis should be given on both formal as well as informal ways of learning. Both should be complementing each other and thus creating a healthy learning environment for the students to bring out maximum out of them. It should help to improve their varied skills and competencies such as creativity, critical analysis, problem solving, etc.

3) Appropriate Pupil- Teacher Ratio: In India, in majority of schools the pupil-teacher ratio is very high which not a very good indicator for quality education. Efforts should be made to reduce it so that the burden of the teachers lessens and they can concentrate on each and every student and work more effectively for their all-round development.

4) Promoting Reflective, Creative, Innovative and Interactive Learning Environment: The conventional methods of teaching and learning prevalent in India are very repressive. They fail to develop skills such as creativity, problem solving, critical analysis etc. among students. Thus, new methods and models of teaching and learning should be brought into practice which are reflective and humane and encouraging students' creativity in classroom and schools.

5) Flexibility in Infrastructure: Keeping in mind the needs of India, the infrastructure should be developed so that it may accommodate the needs of each and every student. For promoting inclusive education it is very important that the infrastructure should be developed in such a way that children with special needs can also feel comfortable and maybe integrated into the education system. Also, the infrastructure should be a synthesis of traditional as well as modern learning styles. It should portray the current scenario of the society, its needs and also be in tune with the needs of the future.

6) Sustainability: In the era of 21st century, we cannot transform our world and achieve sustainable development goals without achieving its goal number four on education viz, " ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Sustainability places emphasis upon the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting eco-systems. Thus, a positive school climate will definitely lead to a sustainable environment of the schools which will help in ensuring quality education.

7) Customized Modes of Teaching and Learning: The teaching learning process should become more meaningful and challenging, as each child must compete only with himself and the joy of mastering a skill or completing a project is intrinsic, enriching the child and enhancing his self-esteem. A child who will work for the sheer joy of self- fulfillment and experience gratification in his own growing aptitude will be self-motivated, productive and happy. The teachers should circulate activities and interact with pupil individually or in small groups watching, commenting, diagnosing, tutoring, asking, making suggestions and motivating.

8) Student - Teacher- Management Relationship: In today' s scenario still a lot of hierarchy is maintained between student, teachers and management due to which school environment becomes closed and regressive. According to Brooks (1999), students are more likely to flourish in a school environment in which they feel comfortable, when they are treated fairly by the teachers and when they feel they have a sense of belonging to the school environment. With regard to the sense of belonging, it is vitally important to establish a degree of hospitality of each and every student, in order to avoid any feeling of isolation and detachment. The school should become a safe and positive place which assumes the role of a facilitator in the learning process, promotes positive relationships and helps students be better prepared to face up the challenges ahead. The school climate could have a positive impact on the student or it could easily turn itself into an obstacle to learning. It could otherwise hinder or facilitate the academic potential in each and every student.

9) Relationship between the School and Community: Schools are defined as a miniature society. So the interaction of the school and community plays a vital role in the education system. School is a special institution, created to serve specific social needs. It, therefore, not only gets aims and objectives from society but its contents and methods are also determined in accordance with the activities, carried on in society. But society is dynamic and changes very frequently. It is, therefore, essential that the character and nature of education, imparted in the school, also change according to the needs and developments of the society.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

As the technologies are improving it is becoming important for our schools to keep pace with the need of the hour and be prepared for the future. Some of the suggestions for making schools future orientated are:

1) Making Education more Learner-centered and Personalized: Students will learn with study tools that adapt to the capabilities of a student. This means above average students shall be challenged with harder tasks and questions when a certain level is achieved. Students who experience difficulties with a subject will get the opportunity to practice more until they reach the required level. Students will be positively reinforced during their individual learning processes. This can result into positive learning experiences and will diminish the amount of students losing confidence about their academic abilities. Furthermore, teachers will be able to see clearly which students need help in which areas.

2) Visibly Relevant and Adaptable: As careers are adapting to the future freelance economy, students of today will adapt to project-based learning and working. This means they have to learn to apply their skills in shorter terms to a variety of situations. Students should already get acquainted with project- based learning in high school. This is when organizational, collaborative, and time management skills can be taught as basics that every student can use in their further academic careers.

3) Free from Time and Space: Students will have more opportunities to learn at different times in different places. E-Learning tools facilitate opportunities for remote, self-paced learning. Classrooms will be flipped, which means the theoretical part is learned outside the classroom, whereas the practical part shall be taught face to face, interactively.

4) Free Choice: Though every subject that is taught aims for the same destination, the road leading towards that destination can vary per student. Similarly to the personalized learning experience, students will be able to modify their learning process with tools they feel are necessary for them. Students will learn with different devices, different programs and techniques based on their own preference. Blended learning, flipped classrooms and BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) form important terminology within this change.

5) Field experience: Because technology can facilitate more efficiency in certain domains, curricula will make room for skills that solely require human knowledge and face-to-face interaction. Thus, experience in ' the field' will be emphasized within courses. Schools will provide more opportunities for students to obtain real-world skills that are representative to their jobs. This means curricula will create more room for students to fulfill internships, mentoring projects and collaboration projects.

6) Data Interpretation: Though mathematics is considered one of three literacies, it is without a doubt that the manual part of this literacy will become irrelevant in the near future. Computers will soon take care of every statistical analysis, and describe and analyze data and predict future trends. Therefore, the human interpretation of these data will become a much more important part of the future curricula. Applying the theoretical knowledge to numbers, and using human reasoning to infer logic and trends from these data will become a fundamental new aspect of this literacy.

7) Changes in the Evaluation System: As courseware platforms will assess students capabilities at each step, measuring their competencies through Q&A might become irrelevant, or might not suffice. Many argue that exams are now designed in such a way, that students cram their materials, and forget the next day. Educators worry that exams might not validly measure what students should be capable of when they enter their first job. As the factual knowledge of a student can be measured during their learning process, the application of their knowledge is best tested when they work on projects in the field.

7) Student Ownership: Students will become more and more involved in forming their curricula. Maintaining a curriculum that is contemporary, up-to-date and useful is only realistic when professionals as well as ' youngsters' are involved. Critical input from students on the content and durability of their courses is a must for an all-embracing study program.

8) Monitoring: Students will incorporate so much independence in to their learning process, that mentoring will become fundamental to student success. Teachers will form a central point in the jungle of information

that our students will be paving their way through. Though the future of education seems remote, the teacher and educational institution are vital to academic performance.

CONCLUSION

As technology is rapidly changing around us, many people worry that technology will overpower human intelligence. Many people think that there will be no students and teachers left in the future as many tasks will be overpowered by technologies. But this is not true, education will never end it will only change its form from one to another. Thus to make the students competent for the future, it is necessary that education should be dynamic and enable the students to be prepared for future. And it becomes the responsibilities of each stakeholder of education to provide such a learning climate which is future ready. In India, it is especially very important to make students who are skilled in future competencies and institutions, which are future ready.

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