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## Good Teachers for All Students: Prospects and Challenges

**Dr Mani Pal Kaur,**

Assistant Prof, Dept Of Sociology,  
SGGS College, Sector-26, Chandigarh  
Email id:manipalsandhu5@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Teaching and learning in contemporary society has undergone tremendous changes due to various overt and covert factors. So has emerged the prospects and challenges involved on the part of teachers as well as students. Therefore this paper specifically highlights three perspectives in this regard. One is the core objective of education for the sake of learning in today's global, digital and capitalistic world; second is 'all students' need good teachers, third is what it means to be a good teacher in the contemporary times and what is its role today.

**Key words:** Education, learning, good teacher

*'Education is not the learning of facts but the training of the mind to think'*  
Albert Einstein

Learning, as Einstein quotes is not only limited to knowing facts but reaching the ability to 'think'. It is this kind of learning based on the objective of thinking and introspection that enriches the learner, the teacher, society and Nation at large. Considering its cumulative effect the role of a teacher becomes equally significant. There are various connotations to the word 'teacher'. Metaphorically life is a teacher, time is a teacher, and parents are the first teachers of the child. Yet when it comes to formal training of students in higher education, what is needed most is a good teacher.

There can be various interpretations of this topic but I will be focussing on three perspectives covering the prospects and challenges in this regard. One is the core objective of education for the sake of learning in today's global, digital and capitalistic world; second is 'all students' need good teachers, third is what it means to be a good teacher in the contemporary times and what is its role today.

The **first** is education for the sake of learning. I will discuss the issues in the broader paradigm of learning objectives in 21<sup>st</sup> century India. The perspective on learning in this high technology International scenario has undergone an overhauling with variety of modes of formal learning available online, distant etc. The ready availability of information online has changed the demands of learners as well as the knowledge society itself. In today's world, those who want to compete must shift from the knowledge society to the concept of the

creative society. The 21<sup>st</sup> century society demands multiple areas of competency with an individual. Therefore students must be trained on new sets of skills. As obvious there is no point in mentioning anything about if students deserve good educators. There is no option otherwise; it has become a matter of existence now. Also the number of learners with diversities of all sorts, call it generation alpha or generation Z, has gone high which poses the issue of what kind of educators these all deserve.

That is why learning objectives are the significant part of the teaching learning process which cannot be attained without introspective guidance of a teacher as a facilitator to the learner.

APJ Abdul Kalam very beautifully quoted:

‘Learning gives creativity, creativity leads to thinking, thinking provides knowledge and knowledge makes you great.’

But considering Bloom’s taxonomy, knowledge is at the lowest level of cognitive objectives. And to relate it with today’s fast, digital and global scenario, ready knowledge is available as plenty of information at your service through SMART HOMES such as amazon’s alexa or google home and such more technical aids. Also Bloom’s taxonomy holds creation or synthesis as highest level. In such information age, the role of a good teacher becomes highly significant who can enable the learner with critical thinking towards the information and arrive at creativity through synthesising it. Another aspect of expectation from learning objectives highly debatable today is the employability of the learners. Now that is another big topic which cannot be detailed here. But the motto created with that objective is popular now ‘Learning, Earning and Living’. This also indicates another debate where in a capitalistic economy, the management oriented education system views student as customer. And this student customer, who pays for education, calculates learning in monetary form and questions the dichotomy of learning as right rather than duty which leads to forced evaluation of teachers’ performance which is again a separate topic of academic discourse. Besides, the ocean of information available around is increasing exponentially, and access to it is at every student's fingertips via the internet. Teaching students what to do with the information is now a valuable commodity. But education is not a product students are not customers, teachers are not tools and universities are not factories

Another take on this regard is about shifting paradigms. In 1995, (November/December) Change magazine published “A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education” by Robert Barr and John Tagg, in which the authors compare two paradigms. The first, traditional paradigm is the Instruction or the Teaching paradigm. And the paradigm shift moves us to the new view: the Learning paradigm. In which, the instructor is no longer an actor on a stage, but a team coach. Also with the shift towards ‘learning’ However herein is the problem as we now have one foot in the old paradigm, and the other foot in the new paradigm. But neither paradigm is good or bad. One paradigm should not be diabolized in comparison to the other one. It is important to progress systematically, and to maintain what is working.

Also focus is more on Sustainable Learning, an emerging philosophy of and aspiration for learning and teaching founded on principles of sustainability. It is not necessarily education for sustainability, rather

sustainable learning, and a new and different idea. The intent of Sustainable Learning and Education is to create and proliferate sustainable, renewable curricula, methods of learning and teaching that instill in people the skills and dispositions to thrive in complicated, challenging, and ever-changing circumstances, while contributing positively to making the world a better place.

**Second** perspective on the issue is ‘all students’ deserve good teachers. Students with good learning abilities or slow learners, in both cases they deserve to be facilitated by good teachers. Because if students are good, it is the responsibility of the teacher to explore his/her manifested capabilities and channelize those towards its accomplished goals. And if the students are slow learners then the responsibility of the teacher doubles and needs most attention. Such students needs to be taken care of with more compassion and trust to motivate them, give opportunities to unfold their hidden distinctive skills and help them reach up to their unexpected yet respectable goals. As Marva Collins quotes: ‘The good teacher makes the poor student good and the good student superior.’

**Third** perspective is what it means to be a good teacher. On this take there are numerous models, thoughts and researches from all around the world.

‘Teachers should be the best minds in the country’

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

‘Best’ is best defined by a skill set that matches the students’ real needs and not by credentials. Also good teachers are not necessarily content experts with huge knowledge storehouse but the ones with tremendous patience and empathy towards their all students to say in same context.

Moreover the term facilitator is most strikingly used in academic discussions on the issue in spite of the word ‘teacher’. Facilitator, the one who cares for, engages and empowers learners. For all material as well as non-material goals for individual, society, Nation and World, teachers definitely play significant role by effective education through effective teaching. Various significant characteristics are mostly derived through researches in general on effective teachers such as: compassionate, good communicator, friendly, good listener, role models, keeps patience, supportive, effective in classroom management, effective in pedagogy, good sense of humor, engaging, adaptive, collaborator, instills confidence and considerate towards the well-being of the students. However there can be multiple perspectives on defining a good teacher as it is a very subjective and relative concept. Each student might have difference of opinion upon evaluating a teacher as good or bad but all may be looking forward to attain their learning objectives from the best facilitator in their own terms. This leads to multiple challenges for a teacher along with an opportunity to innovate creative and comprehensive strategies for better learning outcomes.

## Teaching-Learning in Covid 19

The essence of education lies in inculcating the core values of life leading to development of mind. The amalgam of basic life skills and its core values is the only survival strategy for all generations since time

immemorial. Therefore the educational institutions strive hard to achieve these targeted goals with comprehensive approach utilising various methods, tools and techniques. Then why the students today are found most often in situations of dilemma struggling hard to choose the right way? Reasons are multiple for this. The front runner among those is the trending ideology of the human race- Capitalism, which puts us in self created dilemma of ethics and profit. And dreadfully evident are its consequences today which has locked us inside our homes if we want to survive sparing no other option. The loss is irreparable. But our future depends only and only on the education system which can channelize tremendous energy of youth towards a better world. Hence the role of all the stakeholders of education system has become all the more challenging but feasible.

We have landed up in this phase of society which has forced the nations to depend more on indigenous resources, more on virtual linkages globally but not physical and facilitated only by the high technology means. The innovative, creative and online resources which our education system was planning to inculcate at a gradual pace has suddenly become the only option for teachers and students to stay connected for teaching and learning. Its challenges which were haunting the teaching fraternity have become the reality. In the absence of enough e-learning resources on the teachers' as well as the students' end, the objectives of online teaching learning are resulting to be ineffective for the larger part of rural and marginalised students. For all the faculties - sciences, social sciences and languages, the overhauling of curriculum, teaching methodologies and reading materials is the need of the hour. Most important is to motivate the ever disinterested lot of students amidst all pessimism. Challenges are manifold so should be the opportunities which need to be explored.

My personal experience in this regard also highlights the above issue at hand. It was not late than December end in 2019 when in an academic training programme, we were discussing similar issues like the role of ICT in teaching learning today, role of good teachers for contemporary students etc. Such issues were discussed analysing both the challenges and prospects involved therein. But we did not realise then that in no time immediately after the completion of our training we will actually be facing such problematic situation due to Covid 19 lockdown, when our faculty members like all others in the country will have to find all feasible options for e-learning resources so that the studies of our students do not suffer. And that's it, the challenges which we had to tackle in few months or coming years, they stand before us face to face now.

Thankfully with very few concepts incomplete from syllabus of my assigned classes my worry too was less. Major concern was to engage students till their final semester examinations. Anyways with the help of my notes and online genuine reference material incomplete syllabus was accomplished. As a huge reliever, came pouring the assignments given to students. They sent them through whatsapp group and on my email. A few queries came through phone call and were resolved. I had to fix the time for their interaction with me as they

were sending messages at odd hours. The student group admins were actually dealing rightly with their fellow student's random queries without waiting for my response. And they seem eager to see my message for another assignment or further instruction. But the problem here which I felt was the assessment of actual learning outcomes. For that again only the final examinations will be the only criteria left. And examination conduct itself is under scanner by the university authorities amidst pandemic situation in the absence of sufficient health security measures for such large number of students. Till then I can share question banks with students along with some motivational inputs.

Considering the risk of Covid 19, there seems no fixed date when offline real classes can be resumed or even if resumed will the students come out or if they come out to attend the classes, will they show interest in offline classes or would desire only online learning mode to their convenience. If such situation prevails for long, the teaching learning scenario under a major overhaul may portray a new age virtual institutional platform for home learning. And friends this home learning may not be welcoming for many of us for long but left with this the only option, let us be optimistic and explore its benefits which are keeping our students more close to family, nature and most important keeping them away from the greed of more and more when all of us are learning to survive with minimum resources and sharing the extra ones. Society seems to be in another transition from infinite demand to minimum needs fulfilment, from future worries to living and cherishing the present blessings, from complex to simple. This has offered sociological imagination more food for thought and analyse its best logico comments.

This may include innovation pedagogy or androgogy as per the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning requirements discussed earlier. The key features of 21<sup>st</sup> century Pedagogy may comprise of:

- Building technological, information and media fluencies
- Developing thinking skills
- Making use of project based learning
- Using problem solving as a teaching tool
- Using assessments with timely, appropriate and detailed feedback also reflection over it
- It is collaborative in nature and uses enabling empowering technologies
- It fosters Contextual learning bridging the disciplines and curriculum areas

These features awaken the teachers to be lifelong learners to facilitate the learners. With such kind of elaborations on the prospects of teaching and learning, I feel something fruitful can be initiated towards our larger goals for creating better realities of life. I also believe that being a teacher is a very special gift, and those that have that gift make a positive, lasting impression on the lives of their students that can totally change the trajectory of their lives.

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