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<u>Understanding the Need for Holistic Education Models and its Importance in the lives of Children Living in Indian Urban Slums</u>

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Abstract

Education has always been synonymous to lecture learning and memorisation; both variables that change as we move from one student to another. This paper talks about the need to change how education is looked at and what it stands for, in a way that it is not limited to a set pattern of learning. This study also focuses on how often when we talk about children being educated we leave a substantial lot behind; the slum youth, which leads us to believe that a radical change is required, a model that strikes a perfect balance between multiple aspects of learning and not just one: The Holistic Education model. The Holistic Education Model is one that allows children to not be mere passive observers but to be able to research, locate, analyse and differentiate between right and wrong which further helps develop them as a whole. The importance of the same is evident as the paper moves forward with a practical example that has changed the dynamics of education for the slum youth in one small part of Mumbai. Given that previously this topic has not been given a fair amount of consideration, this study seeks to be a standpoint for further research on the same.

1.0 Introduction

The process of teaching has evolved greatly over time but for far too long we've been focusing on the wrong places to work on, with wrecked strategies and deep-rooted monotony. Since time immemorial, two important elements associated with any learning and teaching methods are students and teachers, however, it is important to note that learning is a two-way process and that efforts from both ends are equally essential.

Furthermore, when it comes to children in Urban Slums of India, most traditional methods fail.

This paper aims at analysing traditional learning methodologies in order to understand the need to transform, in a way that learning is a no longer tedious task, for both, the students and the teachers.

Dwelling on this, taking it further to Urban Slums and understanding:

a. why most children in slums are not enrolled in schools

b. why out of those slum children that are enrolled in schools, attendance rates are particularly low and;

c. why most of the little number of children that do attend schools dropout at early stages

The core aim of this research is to bring forth answers to the aforementioned and highlight various kinds of issues and challenges that exist around the question of the education of the Urban Slum Youth. For the purpose of standardization, throughout this paper, Holistic Development will refer to the development of intellectual, mental, physical, emotional, and social abilities in a child so that he or she is capable of facing the demands and challenges of everyday life.

2.0 The Existing System

a. An Analysis

In a 1915 book titled Schools of Tomorrow, the educator John Dewey complained that the conventional public school "is arranged to make things easy for the teacher who wishes quick and tangible results." Rather than fostering personal growth, he argued, "the ordinary school impresse[s] the little one into a narrow area, into a melancholy silence, into a forced attitude of mind and body." In criticizing the academies of his day, Dewey made the case that education needed to adopt new instructional approaches based on future societal needs. He argued that twentieth-century schools should reorganize their curricula, emphasize freedom and individuality, and respond to changing employment requirements. In one of his most widely quoted commentaries, Dewey warned that "if we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow." Writing nearly a century ago, Dewey could not have envisioned the current world of the Internet, electronic resources, digital textbooks, interactive games, social media, and robotics. Yet his basic message remains highly relevant today. If schools do not reinvent themselves to engage students and train them for needed areas, it will not help the students to grow. People hang on to old ways of doing things because the benefits of inventions are not clearly apparent. Rather than embracing transformation and using technology to further innovation, organized interests fight change and argue that the old system is superior to newly emerging ones. That type of status quo orientation slows change and raises the political and economic costs of innovation. ("New Models of Education," n.d.)

b. Drawbacks

All too often, going to school for six hours for half the year is considered to be enough and fulfilling for a child's educational growth which is not completely true. The existing system leaves the students hanging around with more textbooks than practical knowledge. The following are some persisting disadvantages of lecture learning:

● Lectures are a one-way format of teaching where students are passive which in turn does not allow them to work upon their creative learning skills.

● Lectures presume that all students learn at the same pace and are at the same level of understanding.

● They are not suited for teaching higher orders of thinking such as application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation; for teaching motor skills, or for influencing attitudes or values.

● Lectures emphasize learning by listening, which is a disadvantage for students who have other learning styles.

● They require greater attention spans which vary from student to student.

(*Advantages and Disadvantages of Lectures*, n.d.)

Maria Montessori said, "Education cannot be effective unless it helps a child open up himself to life" and this is where the concept of Holistic education comes into the picture. The day we stop running behind lecture learning and start investing time and efforts in innovating better learning methods, the dynamics of teaching will change forever.

3.0 Traditional Teaching Methods and Children in Indian Urban Slums

a. Overview

Hope for solving the massive social problems associated with urban poverty appears to centre increasingly on improvement in the methods of educating the culturally deprived children of the slums. Educators have long recognized that such children enter school under handicaps not imposed on children of the middle class, that slum children often seem immune to standard instructional programs, and that a relatively large proportion of them quit school early and become misfits and unemployable. Some inevitably drift into delinquency.

Early efforts to increase the less fortunate child's capacity to learn took the form chiefly of remedial classes, of shifting the child from academic to shop or manual training work, and of providing extra services ranging anywhere from free meals to field trip. It is generally realized, however, that the slum child's maladjustment to school is often too deep and too complex to be affected by routine or piecemeal palliatives.

After considerable research and experimentation during the past decade, educators have now come to the conclusion that major changes in policies and programming are necessary to make the public school a place of learning for the slum child. Blueprints for a radical overhaul of city schools have been drawn up, and some of the proposed changes have already been put into practice. ("Education of Slum Children," n.d.)

b. **Factors Preventing Students from Regular Schooling**

Out of the little number of students that are enrolled in schools and among the currently attending children, over-age is common. Based on the household survey, there are three reasons for late admission. Firstly, there are administration-related factors, like a birth certificate, which is mandatory for admission to any government school. Parents have to seek to obtain an affidavit for a birth certificate. The application for school admission date is also sometimes limited to a very short period of time. If parents are unaware, unavailable or unable to apply for schooling on that specific day(s), children are less likely to be admitted later due to the non-availability of seats. Secondly, there can be school-side problems. There are often not enough seats for all the children in the area. Multiple state surveys by UNICEF which looked at school children as a whole highlighted the bias against girls and lower castes.

It is also argued that the enrolment in private schools was small due to the fact that very few families could bear the expenses.

Reasons for "never attended" are financial constraints, followed by underage and parents' negative perception of education per se. The National Sample Survey in 2004/05 showed that the most cited reason for never-attended school among 5 to 14-year-old children is "education is not considered as necessary" at the national level. While parental perception is a dominant reason for never-attended in India as a whole,

the cost of education is an obstacle to attending school in slum areas, followed by parental understanding for age for admission and for the importance of education. (UNESCO, 2010)

It will, however, be inappropriate to not mention how things are slowly changing when it comes to awareness of parents in light of the importance of education but to date, the factors pushing away slum children from schools outweigh the ones that pull them towards it.

c. Government Policies on Paper and in Practice

A variety of basic learning opportunities are at least theoretically available for urban deprived children in slum areas. However, only half the children attended school and one fifth dropped out of school. (UNESCO, 2010)

Schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao quantitatively aims at addressing the declining Child Sex Ratio in India and qualitatively aims at "changing mindsets regarding the girl child's education". The approach, conceptualised by the government, involved "multi-sectoral action" through three ministries: Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare and Human Resource Development. However, four years later, data released by the government show that its main aim has been publicity. Over 56 per cent of the funds allocated under the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme from 2014-15 to 2018-19, was spent on "media-related activities". In contrast to this, less than 25 per cent of the funds were disbursed to districts and states. Over 19 per cent of the funds weren't released by the government in the first place. (Menon, 2019)

Such loopholes in government policy implementation are the reason why the number of people targeted from a particular scheme is larger than the ones actually being benefitted.

All of this comes down to the question that why isn't the traditional system fit for a slum child? And the fact that government policies can lure parents into getting their children enrolled in schools but often fail to make them stay. Something that calls for a radical change in methodologies.

4.0 Holistic Education- The Game Changer

Holistic education is based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace. Holistic education aims to call forth from people an intrinsic reverence for life and passionate love of learning. This is done, not through an academic "curriculum" that condenses the world into instructional packages, but through direct engagement with the environment. Holistic education nurtures a sense of wonder. (infed.org, 2013)

True to its name, holistic education places an emphasis on the whole growth of a learner instead of emphasizing only specific parts of the human experience. It deemphasizes materialism while promoting growth in all areas of the human experience: intellectual, emotional, social, and so forth. Proponents of holistic education argue that it promotes balanced relationships between not only people but between people and their environment. Taken all together, holistic education emphasizes democratic learning, emotional health, and relationship growth, to a far greater degree than the traditional learning environment. (Loveless, n.d.)

Holistic education aims at:

● Emphasizing learning by doing and provide hands-on projects and opportunities
● Providing regular opportunities for group work and the development of social skills
● Facilitating understanding and action as the goals of learning instead of rote knowledge
● Promoting collaboration and cooperation rather than competition
● Educating for social responsibility and democracy
● Creating life-long learners
● De-emphasizing the use of textbooks in favour of varied learning resources (2017)

Countries like Japan and New Zealand have been trying to include the development of the whole or the holistic model of education in their regular curriculums for over a decade now and have observed significant behavioural changes in students. The challenge, however, is to implement models of holistic education in Urban Slums.

5.0 Understanding how the Holistic Model can be taken to slums of India

Noting that children in Urban Slums and school-based learning do not complement each other, several organisations and changemakers in India have attempted to take the holistic model of education to slums which is essentially the need of the hour.

a. **Khoj Community School: Setting an example**

With the belief that education is an asset that should reach every child as a prerequisite, Khoj Community School, Mumbai is one of its kind.

By education, they do not mean the rote-based learning that most schools across India bestow, where something beyond the blackboards and curriculum is rarely even attempted, but a holistic form of imparting knowledge, that would help children to look forward to attending school, and help them go beyond memorising topics or scoring marks. With these beliefs, Amrita Nair, Sangeeta Zombade, and Rohit Kumar set out on a journey to provide quality education to children from lesser privileged sections of the society and founded the Khoj Community School in Mankhurd's Lallubhai Compound in Mumbai. Starting with kindergarten, the school is modelled on the structure of including the next standard with each passing year until grade 10 and aspires to serve as a lab school for contextually relevant research, training, and development for advanced educational practices in India. To offer a high quality, contextually relevant and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) integrated education to our students, the school is rooted into the following core principles: Concept-based Curriculum, Multicultural Education and Community Development. (Priya S., 2018)

From the above-mentioned example, it is evident that no matter how deep-rooted the problem may be and that it might not be solved in a day or a month even, you never know how much value can a bunch of youth enthusiasts create in the lives of these children. To note that it is possible to change the lives of people through methods that do not involve older methods of strict lecture training rather imbibe values through creativity, role play, hand-on projects, outdoor classes and interesting games. At the end of the day, before history or politics, children living in slums need to be taught to dream bigger.

6.0 Conclusion

In a world where nothing is constant except change, it is highly important in sectors like education to not overlook the need for change. The existing models may prove to be successful for a certain lot of students, however, what is important is to realise how each individual is unique in their own sense and should not be pushed to learn by one set technique. Young enthusiasts' successes towards the cause are proof that it is possible to bring about this change and to be necessarily driven by it, which makes it equally possible for governments and states to make inclusive programs for children in slums so that learning is not just their far fetched dream. Not immediately but a gradual shift towards holistic learning and development will prove to be the key to make learning effortless for both the teachers and the students.

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