



## AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

"Education is key to the preservation and progress of any society. Education is an effective weapon to bring in change that is required in any "system." Teaching and learning are the two important components of an education system. With a lot of changes happening, teaching and learning have gone through various phases of changes. The challenges faced by the present day teachers are numerous. The present day teachers have an important role in bringing about the reforms in the education system and help the students and in turn the society to prepare for the future. Hence, the teachers must be actively involved in the conception and design of reforms from the beginning. Similarly, the challenges faced by the students are also numerous on both personal and academic fronts. Somehow, through various means, they have a "vague insight" into these challenges along with various solutions. However, they would lack a "clear insight" to delineate an appropriate solution to any particular challenge making the role of the present day teacher even more crucial to convince the student with an appropriate solution.

**Keywords:** Education, Society, Challenges, Opportunities, Vague Insight, Clear Insight, Collaborative, Integrate, Interdependency, Appropriate Solution.

### Introduction

"Education is of utmost importance for a healthy society, and teachers are the crux of this education system. For teachers to develop a healthy society, they have to be provided with relevant tools and techniques and training to use them in a classroom. A society which values and supports its teachers and keep the morale of its teachers high are the ones that thrive and flourish.

Education teaches to "respect and value" the culture, traditions and norms of a society. It also gives an insight into some of these traditions and norms questioning the rationale behind such practices. A teacher is expected to be the guiding force in analyzing and giving an appropriate explanation to these and lead the students towards being valuable citizens of the country. Since the beginning of this century, i.e., the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the children are exposed to marked uncertainty like the impact of globalization, development and advancement in technology, exposure to newer communication tools (cellphones, tabs, laptops), severe economic recession worldwide, terrorism, school violence, significant breakdown in societal norms, etc.

To protect the children from the above, parents, the education institutions, and the society as a whole have become highly protective. They have been raising the children by telling them that they are special and winners all the way for whatever they are.

With the development and advancement in technology in the past few decades, imparting education has become easier, far reaching, and more effective and is extended to the Children with Special Needs, the Animals as well as the Machines (Artificial Intelligence in Robots) too.

As man has realized that his potentials are much greater, he has not just limited himself to the earth and is venturing deeper into space. This has posed new challenges to him, and he is in the constant process of refining and re-inventing himself as well as the tools that he is using in his ventures, and teaching these "tools" to think, act, and take decisions like humans has become even more important in his process of re-inventing and improvisation.

### Background – Teaching and Learning

#### Ancient Methods

In India, from time immemorial, it has been believed that the ultimate goal of life is self-realization and the aim of education in India has been to attain the self-realization by exposing the student to all the possible experiences of life. The child learnt the first lessons of life from the mother and the elders of the house by listening to their words of wisdom and by observing them. Generally, the child followed in the footsteps of his father and continued in the same profession or occupation of his father learning the skills of the trade from him. There existed a system of vocational training also where the "master craftsman" or "artisans" took students under their fold as apprentices and taught them their skills.

Later the Vedic system of education developed which comprised of the Gurukula (place of study), the Guru (teacher), and the disciple (student). Here the disciple had to reside in the gurukul for the whole duration of his studies and learn only from the guru. The gurukul system established a personal relationship between the guru and the disciple. The disciple residing in the gurukula not only learnt the vedas from the guru but also got a chance to observe how his guru responded to various situations arising in the day-to-day life. This observation taught the disciple to lead his own life as he grew up and became a



part of the society in which he lived. The education system in ancient India basically encouraged the students to learn through discussions and debates. The extension of the gurukul system was seen in the Higher-Learning centers like Takshila and Nalanda universities. The gurukula system lasted through the British rule until they introduced the current system of education in India, which has continued to this day.

In the British era, Thomas Babington Macaulay believed that during that period traditional India lacked any knowledge or means to teach the modern skills that was sweeping across Europe and some other parts of the world as there was a significant difference in the means of communication. He felt at that time that the best education for Indians to learn the nitty-gritties of the modern development of that time would best happen in English and introduced English education in India, especially, through his famous minute of February 1835.

Sometime about 2500-3000 BC, in the other parts of the world, with the advent of civilization, education became more important as people living in bigger communities had to convey the necessities and rules of living amongst them. For instance, education in ancient Greece took center stage for people to understand the democratic rules that were implemented in Greece. Philosophers and thinkers encouraged “questions of educational method” entering the national discourse. Plato felt that the Socratic method of education comprising of inquiry and debate stimulated critical thinking and illuminate great ideas.

Since time immemorial, the goal of a teacher has been to find specific and interesting ways to teach students and encourage them to use their knowledge wisely. We can cite the examples of “Panchantantra,” the animal fables, narrated by Vishnu Sharma to the three princes to mend their ways, Gautama Buddha’s Jataka tales and many more.

### **Medieval and Modern Period Education**

During the medieval and modern periods (between 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), in India, the gurukulas and the centers of higher learning like Takshila and Nalanda retained their importance. During the same period, the Arabs and Central Asian people introduced the Muslim educational models through madrasas in India.

Actually, the Jesuits in 1542 founded the St. Paul’s College in Goa, India, and introduced the European college system along with printing of books. A French traveler, by name François Pyrard de Laval, visited Goa during 1608 and described the College of St Paul praising the wide variety of subjects taught there free of charge. He has clearly mentioned that at that point in time it had around 3000 students, and its library was one of the biggest in Asia. He also mentions in his book that the first printing press in India was mounted there.

In the other parts of the world, during the same medieval period, great teachers like Comenius in Bohemia wanted all the children in his country to learn, for which, he created an illustrated textbook “The World in Pictures,” which included things the children would be familiar with in their day-to-day life and used it to teach them.

### **19th Century – Mandatory Education**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the most significant education system that mandates mentioning is the Prussian education system which made education mandatory to all its children. The Prussian education model insisted upon classroom-management skills to be incorporated in the teaching process to make teaching effective. This model was accepted and received world-wide acclaim and was introduced as an ideal way of education system in the other parts of the world.

### **20th Century**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the improvement in day-to-day lifestyle and demand for comforts brought in various professions, courses and requirements. To cope with this change and cater to the demands of the new professions, the education system also had to change. This change brought in various ways of learning and teaching through radio, television, internet, multimedia, hands-on activity, etc.

### **Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

#### **Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher**

The challenges faced by the present day teachers are numerous. The present day students are quite different from those students of previous centuries. Today’s students prefer working in groups and look for hands-on experiences be it in groups or as individuals. They enjoy trial and error methods in their education. They do not highly value reading or listening to the lectures, which has been a traditional way of learning in earlier days. The students want learning to be creative, interactive, and fun, and in turn enjoy thinking outside-the-box.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century students have been found to have unique characteristics because of which they differ a lot in their ideologies and opinions, and these differences may not necessarily be a weakness within them. These innate characteristics in these students have also affected their “learning” in both positive and negative ways. Hence the 21<sup>st</sup> century students cannot be forced to adopt the stereotype education models of the previous centuries, thus the present day teachers are forced to adopt



“Interactive Teaching,” “Skill-based Education,” “Counseling and Guiding,” and “Exchange of ideas through discussion and feedback” to impart education.

### **Opportunities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teacher**

Where the 21<sup>st</sup> century is posing challenges to the teachers, the same is providing them with a lot of opportunities. The opportunities are in the form availability of tools, technology, and resources for teaching along with chalk and board teaching; immediate sharing of knowledge and expertise to overcome uncertain and problematic situations; pre-informed and expressive students giving opportunities to implement changes in the classroom; help and support from the authorities, society and the government; availability of on-hand training programs in softskills and new concepts like emotional intelligence to improve and upgrade teaching efficiency; and revised grading systems giving the teachers a greater control over the student community.

### **Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Learner**

The present day learner faces challenges in plenty, namely, Personal Challenges and Academic Challenges.;

**Personal Challenges:** Making a Choice; Relationship Management; Stress Management; Time Management; Attention Span and Concentration; Different Interests; Language Abilities; Cultural Background; Health Issues; Meeting the Expectations of the Parents, the Education institutions, and the Society; Create a New Identity; Fear of failure and rejection; and Adapting to Different Environments and Lifestyles.

**Academic Challenges:** Over Challenging Goals; High Levels Of Competition; Peer Pressure; Ever Changing Educational and Economic Policies of the Government; Availability of too much Information Leading to Confusion; Adapting to Newer Ways of Teaching; Adapting to Ever Changing Technology; Changing in Grading System; Acquiring New Skills of Learning, Working in Groups, etc.

### **Opportunities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Learner**

The present day learners are quite capable of overcoming the challenges as they understand the varying intensities of these challenges and arrive at solutions from their own experiences, the experiences of others, and the plethora of information which they have access to through various medias.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century learner have easy access to relevant, refined, appropriate, time-tested information. The institutions over a period of time have set relevant, appropriate and revised syllabus catering to the needs of the students. Availability of learner or studentcentric skill-based education leading to expertise in a particular area and immediate acceptance into the workplace. Interdisciplinary approaches in the education system have been a big advantage to the present day student as they can have first-hand information, if not experience, related to the functioning of other associated sectors. Use of technology in the classrooms has been a boon to the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner as it helps provide standard solutions and clarity on all subjects and concepts making learning effective and interesting. In the best interest of the students, Personality Development Programs are provided by various institutions to overcome personal challenges with a wide array of counselors and mentors.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is quite clear from the available information that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century “Teaching” and “Learning” are significantly different from the “Traditional” methods of teaching and learning. It is observed that the 21<sup>st</sup> century methods of teaching and learning have evolved over the past centuries. In spite of facing all the challenges there are numerous opportunities for the teachers and learners to achieve better results.

Given the challenges faced by the present day teachers, they are expected to have the “required knowledge” and take on new roles and forge new relationships with their students and colleagues. In case of any shortcomings, they are expected to glean the information from the vast resources available to them to fulfil the expectations of the student community and the institutions likewise. They themselves must be lifelong learners and encourage their students to follow suit catering to the everchanging needs of the “society” at various degrees as best possible. In the present day’s context, the teacher is expected to teach the students “to learn to live together” by knowing, by doing, and by being a part of the society they live in.

As far as the learners are concerned, they can benefit from student-centered, technology-driven and collaborative education. This can be used to integrate themselves with the diverse society. They are advised to overcome the challenges and use it as an opportunity to improve themselves and contribute to the present situation on hand.

The teachers and students should adopt scientific and strategic methods which requires “interdependency” to share their “learnings” and support each other for a better future.



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