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EDUCATION NOW AND TOMORROW

EDUCATION TIMES RECENTLY ORGANISED A SEMINAR, 'ROAD TO REFORMS: RETHINKING THE CURRICULUM', PROVIDING A PLATFORM FOR EDUCATIONISTS, POLICY-MAKERS AND INDUSTRY LEADERS TO SHARE THEIR VIEWS AND CHALK OUT THE ROADMAP FOR EDUCATION

With India poised to become a knowledge economy, the focus is on building a strong educational system that helps the country win a global edge. As part of the continuing efforts to highlight the road ahead, Education Times recently organised a seminar, Road to Reforms: Rethinking the Curriculum, providing a platform for educationists, policy-makers and industry leaders to share their views and chalk out the roadmap for education.

Addressing the inaugural session, N.H. Singh, member of Parliament and chairman, board of governors, Management Development Institute (MDI), set the tone for the event by stating that the vision of education is to create an innovative society by control over the available teaching methodologies, evaluation procedures and to bring about comprehensive change in order to fulfil this aim.

The seminar -- Rethinking the Path, Current scenario and the need for a new curriculum framework, etc. The road ahead -- addressed a range of issues, thus, motivating an agenda for action.

SCHOOL EDUCATION SCENARIO

One of the major concerns of school education in India, today, is that it doesn't integrate with our higher education system. As the speakers pointed out, it is imperative that -- along with a holistic curriculum -- children are trained to join the dots to get the bigger picture. Quality education at the elementary, primary and secondary level should be in sync with what is taught at the higher level.

School education should focus on devising teaching and learning methodologies that are engaging and contextual. Unlike rote learning, to succeed in the present, it cannot do without with life-skills and problem-solving abilities. According to Ashish Rajgopal, co-founder & CEO, Discovery Education, learning is all about community participation and real-life contexts. India, he stressed, is in need of students who can contribute towards a free flowing and flexible classroom learning.

However, a range of issues continue to plague the school education system in India. For instance, despite emphasis on STEM to classroom

level, little going on -- quality is yet to be a priority. To achieve that goal, some speakers felt, students should not be spoon-fed. Instead, a hands-on approach and self-learning and cognitive activities and make them lifelong learners. Integration of pedagogical research within the classroom is also another area that needs to be focused upon. Finally, the National Curriculum Framework, which is comprehensive in approach, is yet to be implemented as a full-fledged measure to achieve the results.

HIGHER EDUCATION SCENARIO

Higher education in India needs a reality-check. According to a recent McKinsey report, a mere 10% of our business graduates and 20% of our engineering graduates are employable. In fact, around 80% of our graduates do not have industry skills. Anilash Jidagan from Infosys & Young stressed that the higher education system should reinvent and evolve. Anand, school head, Intel Education South Asia, agreed to say that, ideally, education should be career and practice driven, personalisation of contemporary curriculum.

Students should essentially be application-oriented. They will encourage students to branch out and not remain restricted within the limitations of a specific discipline. P.P. Reddy, dean (academics), IITB University, added that academics should have a lateral context. That can help students think cross-disciplinary, answer what they are taught. In fact, Pragna Srivastava, joint commissioner, Ministry of Higher Education, pointed out that an interdisciplinary approach was important to facilitate cross-disciplinary thinking.

While an out-of-the-box approach is commendable, a structured but contemporary curriculum is important. Deepak Prasad, vice-chancellor, Delhi University, emphasised the need for timely curriculum review and updation. He stressed that the submissions of various committees (in terms of curriculum modifications) need to be addressed with more seriousness.

Besides, most educationists agreed that an open-ended system needs to be substituted by a system of continuous assessment through which individual progress can be monitored. Some other areas of concern that were discussed were shortage of qualified faculty, teacher recruitment and training. Hari Gokhale, vice-chancellor, Bharosa Hitech University (BHU),



and former chairman of SGC, pointed out that the Indian education system is in need of objective teacher evaluation.

As far as higher learning is concerned, lack of a research environment is an issue of concern. The need for a more competitive funding to boost research initiatives was stressed. Also, the need for a collaborative industry-academia ecosystem was emphasised to make research more relevant. In this context, Prasad pointed out that collaboration should enjoy federal grants in terms of pursuing their research. "If we want to leverage the activities of these universities to further our research initiatives we have to make funds available for research. Also, adequate mechanisms have to be in place to safeguard

WAY AHEAD

Since of the information society and the knowledge economy at a global level has reinforced education as a key economic and business driver. The demographic, differentials reveal that in the next 10 to 15 years, India would have a youth-centric population profile. In such a situation, new opportunities are likely to be optimised. As far as the future is concerned, while greater coordination between regulatory bodies and policy making agencies is required, Kiran Datta, chairperson, Working Group on Undergraduate Education, said that the universities should adopt a student-centric approach and stress on practical orientations.

To sum up, what evolved from the seminar was that India needs to promote an education system that stresses on innovation, incorporates a digital environment and devices, nationally-level education to such a manner that it contributes to the economy.



RISE OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AT A GLOBAL LEVEL HAS REINFORCED EDUCATION AS A KEY ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DRIVER