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## **Creating Future Ready Schools for Holistic Development**

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### **Abstract**

The paper reflects on the theme of Creating Future Ready Schools for Holistic Development. For creating future ready schools, it is imperative to understand the social, cultural and environmental developments of present times that influence the policy making with the changing times. Based on empirical research the first part of the text deals with the identified changes in the policy making ensuring holistic development of the learners. The second part deals with imparting vital soft skills like good communication, creative thinking and conflict resolution. The final section deals with imparting life skills for self-driven learning by becoming aware about self-efficacy. The study reflects that utilisation of pedagogical approach can enhance self-driven self-management. The main finding of the study is that learners who are well trained in soft skills and life skills can adapt themselves easily in the fast-paced world. New educational practices and approaches need to be explored and practised by schools to ensure future ready global citizens living in a progressive global village. Thus, to create future ready vibrant schools new research-based paradigms like meditation to develop self-efficacy and motivation and an understanding of the environment around us should be promoted.

### **Introduction**

Educational Policy making is a vital and imperative task of drafting a set of laws which are based on principles and values agreed upon by the government in the educational sphere with the changing times. These values and principles are defined by the social, cultural and environmental changes that occur and influence the society. In today's times when the world is turning in to a global village with the growing technological advancements, it has become essential to bring about necessary changes in the educational policies for holistic development of the learners. According to Les Bell and Howard Stevenson (2006)<sup>1</sup>, Education policy is high on the agenda of governments across the world. Global pressures (economic social and cultural) focus increasing attention on the outcomes of education policy and on their implications for economic prosperity and social citizenship. The experience of each individual learner is therefore decisively shaped by the wider policy environment. However, there is often an underdeveloped understanding of how education policy is formed, what drives it and how it impacts on schools and colleges.

There was a time when educational policy as policy was taken for granted ... Clearly that is no longer the case. Today, educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and public contestation ... Educational policy-making has become highly politicised. (Olszen et al. 2004: 2–3)<sup>2</sup>.

Research and technological advancement in the world are giving valuable insight into how educational institutions should work and bring necessary changes in their policies for better learning outcomes. Governments across the world and the educational leadership have a key

role to play in this regard. They need to consider the societal changes in context of the history, geographical location and culture of the location to bring about necessary changes in the educational policies to match the needs of the changing times in a fast-paced society. Thus, it is important for the educational leaders to realise and consider the research-based studies that reflect on the wide extent of the policy environment (Les Bell and Howard Stevenson 2006: 7)<sup>1</sup>.

It is essential to place the study and analysis of school leadership in its socio-historical context and in the context of the moral and political economy of schooling. We need to have studies of school leadership which are historically located and which are brought into a relationship with wider political, cultural, economic and ideological movements in society (Grace 1995: 5).<sup>3</sup>

There is a dire need of change in educational policy which facilitates learners with the holistic development based on knowledge and skills required to sustain the challenges of the present times as global citizens. The school leadership thus has a pivotal role to draft an educational policy that caters to the learning needs of present times of globalisation. The learners need to be emotionally and intellectually strong to develop a socially and economically prosperous society. They should be equipped with essential soft skills and life skills to develop self-driven learning, regulation, responsibility, and motivation by realising their potential and self-worth.

### **1.1 Educational Policy for Holistic Development and Adaptability of Learners as Global Citizens:**

The United Nations GCE (Global Citizenship Education) framework encompasses the essentials of the educational policies that can develop required knowledge, skills and values to prepare learners as futuristic global citizens living in a fast-paced global village creating a harmonious, peaceful and a progressive society.

These are the times when technology is replacing technology and the need of the hour is to organize a well-planned structure of educational policy that caters to the needs of today's generation's learning needs. There is a need for a trans-formative pedagogy that can ensure effective learning outcome in the increasingly interconnected and interdependent world with overwhelming and sometimes misleading information (Global Citizenship Education 2014)<sup>4</sup>.

“We must foster global citizenship. Education is about more than literacy and numeracy. It is also about citizenry. Education must fully assume its essential role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies” . UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 26 September 2012<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the varying interpretation of 'Global Citizens' which is linked with the inter connectivity and interdependence of the countries in economic, social, cultural and political areas, there is a common understanding which refers to sense of a broader community defying the boundaries which separate them and promote common humanity. (Global Citizenship Education 2014 P. 14)<sup>4</sup>. According to H. Marshall (2005)<sup>6</sup>, there is a 'global glaze' that links the local to the global and the national to the international.

To meet the above-mentioned goals, some key pedagogical approaches have been derived based on empirical research. This includes the merging of traditional practices of teaching and learning with ICT, social networking and social media to link students and teachers with each other to benefit from their teaching and learning practices. Global meeting platforms for collaborative learning through various internet tools and applications, government aided programs for visiting schools by students and teachers have been encouraged to motivate and inspire the future learners. This is done to inculcate a sense of belonging for common humanitarian values, promote harmony, respect and peace for all and that defy ongoing tensions between countries.

There is a dire need to promote this pedagogical approach in the educational policies to meet the United Nations sustainable development goals of zero hunger, zero poverty, and remove gender inequalities, equal opportunities and education for all.

This includes the use of curriculum and learning materials that challenge bias, stereotypes, exclusion and marginalization, and the identification and implementation of actions that promote protection and well-being. One of the six principles highlighted in the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)<sup>7</sup> Conflict-Sensitive Education Pack is to promote equity and the holistic development of the child as a citizen.

The aim is to draft and implement an educational policy which is inclusive and includes identified modern pedagogy approaches which is an amalgamation of traditional and modern blend of teaching and learning practices. This includes use of ICT, extra-curricular, sports and curricular activities that benefit the learners and encourage out of the box thinking.

Thus, the UN GCE has some common elements that promote the following competences:

- a. Understanding and respect for multiple levels of identity, races, cultures, religions, and ethnicity.
- b. Deep knowledge of global issues and universal values.
- c. Critical and analytical thinking with values of empathy, equality, respect, liberty, and justice.
- d. Cognitive skills to adopt multi-perspective and multidisciplinary approach.
- e. Team spirit and conflict resolution
- f. Life skills of sense of commitment, responsibility, and decision making.

## **1.2 Imparting Soft skills and Life skills for Holistic Development**

In today's times of globalisation, inter connectivity and interdependence and competition; various studies on educational research has clearly indicated that learners who do not have the required soft skills and life skills find it difficult to succeed professionally. A good academic record and work experience is not sufficient to succeed professionally.

Educational institutions, schools and universities require a pedagogical approach that include imparting soft skills and life skills that empower learners to meet the challenges of the learning and professional sphere.

Soft skills are defined as behavioural attributes of an individual's emotional intelligence. Thus, having good communication, time management, adaptability, creativity, resourcefulness and cognitive skills enhance a learner's professional prospect. These soft skills are complemented by life skills. Life skill is a skill that is desirable for leading good social and healthy life which is a blend of an individual's emotional and intelligence quotient. Some important life skills are team management, conflict resolution and self-driven motivation, management and commitment. These skills are required to be added in the curriculum for better learning and professional prospects.

According to Serby Richard (2003)<sup>8</sup> modern corporate requirements are such that they look specifically for those candidates who can add value to their organisation with their soft skills and the ability to develop and use soft skills which can make the difference between a job offer and enjoyment of new employment.

This view point is substantiated by Hewitt Sean (2008)<sup>10</sup> that, employers' value soft skills because they are just as good as indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications.

Today's professionals require these soft skills apart from academic excellence. This can only be achieved by providing training on these skills. Thus, soft skills are a vital part of professional development. Hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while remaining 85% is made by soft skill (Watts M and Watts R. K, 2008)<sup>10</sup>.

According to Hewitt Sean (2008)<sup>9</sup> soft skills are "non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills" which determines an individual's strength as "a leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator". Soft skills are the traits and abilities of attitude and behaviour rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude (Tobin, 2006)<sup>11</sup>.

According to surveys conducted by Boston College and the University of Michigan, soft skills training could enhance productivity by 12%, increase employee retention, and deliver a 56% return on investment for the organisations (John, 2009). Generally, organisations that provide these training have aimed to enhance various skills such as assertiveness, negotiation, communication, and interpersonal relationships building (John, 2009)<sup>12</sup>.

Thacker and Yost (2002)<sup>13</sup> noted that students require training to be effective team members. Employers often come across that "business graduates lack good team leadership skills". The National Employers Skills Survey (2003)<sup>14</sup>, reported that employers regard shortages in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills (Watkins, 2004)<sup>15</sup>.

The above-mentioned empirical evidences give a clear and identified requirement for soft skills training to the learners and thus become necessary to be included in the school, and college curriculum and pedagogy.

Some of the Key Theories on Soft Skills Development are (Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills Among Adolescents and Young Adults 2017- USAID)<sup>16</sup>:

1. Self-determination theory (SDT) - Focuses on the self-motivation behind the choices people make (Deci and Ryan, 1985 and 1991; Ryan and Deci, 2000 and 2006). The theory assumes that three basic psychological needs motivate people and support developing skills: need for competence (ability), relatedness (being connected), and autonomy (freedom of action).
2. Social learning theory - Posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context (Bandura, 1977). Individuals learn to behave by observing adults and peers around them; through direct instruction, whereby teachers, role models, and other authorities tell youth how to behave; and through reinforcing behaviours (WHO, 2003; Bandura, 1973).
3. Self-efficacy theory - Bandura (1977) suggests that behaviour is determined by a person's beliefs regarding her ability to master skills and tasks as well as her confidence in causing something to happen. Self-efficacy, in turn, can determine the person's choice to approach or avoid challenges.
4. Cognitive-behaviour model - Focuses on how thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes affect feelings and behaviour. Cognitive-behaviour theories are the foundation for cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT), which helps people identify and challenge negative thinking patterns to change the way they feel about situations and, in turn, change their behaviours (Beck, 2011).
5. Self-theories (Mind sets) - Investigates how people develop beliefs about themselves (i.e., self-theories) and how these self-theories create their psychological worlds by shaping thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Dweck, 2000).

### **1.3 Role of Soft Skills in developing Life Skills**

Schools and universities play a key role by imparting soft skills for personality development and acquiring life skills. As study shows that while soft skills training is mainly the focus at the university and college level for learner's professional needs, the onus should be on developing a curriculum which develops soft skills and life skills together right from early schooling years of the learners.

The purpose of teaching life skills to young learners boosts their confidence and makes them independent and responsible. It develops positive social skills and etiquette. It enables them to remove stage fear, and prepares them as independent individuals who are self-motivated, disciplined and committed.

Emerging evidence shows that soft skills can be promoted among youth through programs and activities, although we still lack youth program evaluations with long-term follow-up as well as evaluations in the context of developing countries (Heckman and Kautz, 2013; J-PAL, 2013; Puerta et al., 2016). Meta-analyses have shown that participating in activities such as outdoor adventure programs, service-learning, and school based and after-school Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs can have a positive impact on a number of soft skills.

(Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills Among Adolescents and Young Adults 2017-USAID)<sup>17</sup>.

Initial studies also show positive returns on investment in soft-skills building programs that target youth, although more research is needed on costs and benefits. Although the literature on the effectiveness of programs and activities that develop soft skills is still very limited, the research focus is slowly shifting. The emphasis is no longer only on determining whether programs targeted at adolescents and young adults can have an impact on raising soft skills, but also on understanding how and under what conditions soft skills can be developed through programs. *Belfield et al. (2015)*<sup>16</sup>.

Some of the key definitions of the Key Seven Soft Skills Identified by the USAID Youth Power Action Initiative are Higher Order Thinking Skills, Self-Control, Positive Self Concept, Social Skills, Empathy, Goal Orientation and Communication.

These principles guide program designers and implementers who teach soft skills to adolescents and young adults and include:

1. Promote experiential learning
2. Address skills in combination rather than in isolation in the program design
3. Promote strong relationships
4. Support positive staff practices, such as modelling and positive reinforcement
5. Develop a safe, supportive, and enriching environment
6. Promote integration across the different learning contexts

(Guiding Principles for Building Soft Skills Among Adolescents and Young Adults 2017-USAID)<sup>16</sup>.

#### **1.4 New Paradigms for Heart -Brain Connect**

New research aims to find methodologies and principals to develop a heart-brain connect. One such research-based practice is to promote meditation in schools and colleges for learners. According to Vedic science, the true purpose of meditation is to connect oneself to one's deep inner Self. Techniques which achieve that goal serve the true purpose of meditation. Neurological and physiological correlates of meditation have been investigated previously - Hari Sharma<sup>18</sup>.

During the process of meditation, accumulated stresses are removed, energy is increased, and health is positively affected overall. Saraswati SM. Munger (1993)<sup>19</sup>.

Thus, meditation has immense benefits for today's learners to improve focus, reduce stress and maintain self-regulation and balance. It helps learn life skills that create a healthy and positive mind set among learners to battle against unknown life challenges.

The practice of mediation can be included in the school curriculum and become a part of new educational pedagogical approaches for creating future ready schools that foster both physical and mental well-being of the learners for a harmonious, peaceful and progressive world.



## Conclusion

There is a dire need to create schools which have pedagogical approaches which match the needs of today's fast changing world of technological advancement. There is an increasing inter connectivity and interdependence and overwhelming information that may be misleading and confusing for today's learners. New pedagogical approaches and educational policies based on action based and empirical research need to be implemented to meet the teaching learning needs in today's world and develop future ready global citizens living in a thriving global village. The practice of mediation can be an effective paradigm for vibrant future ready schools. A community which develops based on these new approaches will be far more vibrant, responsible, committed and futuristic. To create a better future and a progressive peaceful world, we need to inculcate these new skills among the learners and adopt new paradigms for future ready schools.

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