THE NEED FOR DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY IN INDIAN HIGHER SECONDARY AND SECONDARY CURRICULA TO CATER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

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The communication component of higher secondary and secondary curricula in India has become obsolete. It served Millennials the same way it served the preceding generations and continues to serve the current Generation Z. Digital and Media Literacy skills and competencies needed in the digital and post digital age are not incorporated into these curricula across India. Digital India tried to introduce technology into the education system as tools for learning: the curricula, however, remains the same, despite plans to update them by the MHRD. The paradox of education in India, where it is both the problem and the solution, needs to be fixed at the earliest; India still hasn’t reformed its curricula to incorporate 21st century competencies and skills and that is precisely what is needed. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the current generational traits, higher secondary and secondary curricula and to propose a suitable panacea.

Keywords: Generation Z, India, Education, skill-based learning, Curricula

GENERATION Z TRAITS:

Growing up as digital natives, millennials, individuals born between 1980-1995, exhibit many traits that are exceedingly distinguished from preceding generations; they are multitaskers, hands-on learners, impatient, less likely to conform, gamers, inventive and informal communicators (text and WhatsApp rather than e-mail), lead balanced lives, and tend to prefer motion media to written texts (Sweeney 2-6). These traits are a result of developing during the onset of the digital age.

According to “How to teach Gen Z students” by AICPA, Generation Z, individuals born after 1995, are not miniature millennials. They are digitally oriented as they were born and have been raised in a world where they are constantly stimulated by technology and media. These individuals have a shorter attention span and can multi-task better than preceding generations. They are not only more visually orientated, as a result of being present on various virtual platforms and social networking, but also, constantly communicate on social platforms rather than through older forms of communication. For example: Instagram direct messages, Snapchat videos and Sarahah comments are more common forms of communication among these children than text messages and WhatsApp.

They operate very different from millennials as they live in what can be called a transition between the digital age and the post digital age. By the time they reach adulthood, they will be living in what we know as the “Post Digital Age”. Generation Z students are used to diversity that is infinite and varied choices in all aspects of their lives, even more than millennials who were raised in the digital age not born into it. This has not only given them an innately operating global mindset but has also given them maximum exposure to all facets of life (Singh 61-62).

Connectivity and technological skill are the greatest assets that the Gen Z can bring into the workplace in the future. Additionally, 20.1% of India’s total population are Generation Z who absorb information from varied resources (Mathur and Hameed 63). How then are we still using textbooks as the primary resource for curricula? While many Gen Z traits are still being researched in detail, as the first batch is just approaching adulthood, we can safely presume that they will exhibit similar or stronger millennial traits juxtaposed to traits showcased by any other generation.

THE STATUS OF HIGHER SECONDARY AND SECONDARY CURRICULA IN INDIA:

Few curricula across the globe, and in India, have shifted to skill-based, project-based and collaborative learning etc.; that encompasses deeper approaches to learning like critical thinking, problem solving, communication etc. Media literacy and very importantly, digital literacy have been neglected. According to “The Intersection of Digital and Media Literacy.” by MediaSmarts, the
The Indian Standard Classification of Education states that: at the lower primary level, students are to be introduced to the “ideas, attitudes and behavior required in a school environment”; at the primary level students are to be provided with the “fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics and to prepare them for Upper Primary Education”; Upper Primary Education is defined as “typically designed to build on the learning outcomes from the Primary Education and to prepare them for Secondary Education.”; and finally, secondary and senior secondary education, designed to provide skills relevant for “employment”, “entry to the work force” or higher education. (3-13) This Classification of Education has an underlying objectivist approach to learning and could be a hinderance to connectivism; the latest relevant approach to learning, one that is apt for the coming Post Digital Age. The primary objective for fresh students to imbibe quintessential “behavior required in a school environment” paints a 19th century Industrial Age Education – one size for all- approach. While reading, writing and mathematics are fundamental skills; the digital age, with its e-reading, multimedia, auto-correct, calculators, and constant flow of knowledge in varied forms, has changed the list of “fundamentals”. Furthermore, the Classification, defines secondary education as one designed to provide skills relevant for “entry to work force”, yet, fails to define what these skills are. With respect to this Classification; all curricula in India are failing to meet the final secondary education standard, which is the product of the preceding classifications, as generations lacking in skills relevant to the current age are being produced in India.

Despite the Indian government’s recognition on the “demographic dividend” where the country’s population is majority youth, and there is an abundance of labour; there is limited access to quality skill-based education and a huge disparity in the skills required and the skills available (Okada 169 - 173). While budget speeches and development plans enumerate the need for skill development, and plans have been set in motion as over 60000 vocational and skill development institutions in India have been set up to focus on the current youth the crux of the issue, primary and secondary education has been addressed minimally (Okada 186).

Digital India is an initiative under the Modi government, in 2015, that has pushed e-learning in India to new and improved levels. Especially in Rural India, Digital India has had a positive influence on the secondary and primary education system. However, while the vision sought to bring broadband and WiFi to at least quarter of a million rural villages by 2019, this has not been implemented effectively. This system includes the replacement of the traditional chalk boards, with white boards, projectors, speakers and various other multimedia tools (Thilagavathi 155). However, it must be realized that a switch to modern methods of communicating knowledge cannot be passed off as knowledge itself. While, it is commendable that the government looks to leave behind the traditional chalk and board methods, a practice that was replaced in the late 90’s to early 2000’s globally, it is imperative that curricula is updated to include media and digital literacy. Furthermore, the National Policy on Education, 2016, focused on the failure to effectively implement ICT initiative in many schools, as it became theoretical-based and students learned from textbooks rather than being exposed to a practical, hands-on experience (44).

Effective implementation of Digital India in the education sector is a challenge that has blatantly emerged due to economic factors, for example: Data is still expensive in India. Moreover, teachers themselves are very poorly skilled in Information and Communication technology. (Biswa and Hazra 69) However, The Ministry of Human Resource Development, in March 2018, released a statement claiming that social and ethical issues regarding the use of the internet would be dealt with in the CBSE ICT curriculum. The successful implementation of this initiation is yet to be seen,

SHIFT IN THE ECONOMY AND THE FUTURE FOR GENERATION Z:

The economy is now a knowledge-based one, where competencies, skills, qualifications, and education form the “fittest” workers in the rat race. Transmission of knowledge has swiftly changed due to increased connectivity. However, unfortunately, even though technology has breached class divide, schools have not adapted themselves to benefit from this (Okada 171).

India has not even approached the possibilities of its growth if it shifts focus to the development of its human economy. Arts, tourism, healthcare, design, primary education- services that are not prone to automation in the foreseeable future should be focused on for its survival in the coming post digital era. Gender roles, education, social stereotypes must be reformed to provide the quintessential society (Saxter).

The assumption that foreign markets will remain open to Indian exports ceases to operate with the onset of the digital age. Digital automation has already replaced many low-skill jobs and continues to replace jobs. The required skill set among workers has changed considerably and will continue to change rapidly. Highly educated individuals are sort after in most thriving fields, while mass
communication, social media and digital marketing, are rapidly growing industries (Saxer). India’s current higher secondary and secondary curricula does not cater to these fields, media literacy and digital literacy are absent.

Today, we are still in a position to produce profuse amounts of cheap labor which caters to the global market; however, our job creation record is disappointing and digital automation will further accelerate the jobless growth. India could push towards a service-led economy considering the sufficient highly educated workforce while preparing its future generations for leading the competition in globalized service markets (Saxer) (Okada 170).

CONCLUSION:

Education is both a problem and a solution in India. While the introduction of technology into higher secondary and secondary curricula is still at its nascent stage in India, the introduction of Digital and Media Literacy into urban schools aided by the private sector could mark the beginning of change. CBSE and ICSE schools cater to the middle and upper classes in Indian society and are considered more progressive to begin with. Digital and Media literacy should be introduced as a subject at the secondary and higher secondary level as an elective, but a subject on its own. “Media Studies” as a subject will not only create digital and media literacy within the future generations but will also teach them skills required for the various media jobs that have been created in the job market with the onset of the digital age.

References: