

Albert P'Rayan

A teacher known for her innovative methods was sent as a substitute. In the class, she announced, “Today, I’m not going to teach any subject. Instead, I want you to raise interesting questions for a discussion. Are you ready?”

The class cheered and one curious student immediately asked, “Ma’am, can we ask any question?” “Yes,” she smiled. “Anything you find curious or challenging. I’ll write your questions on the white-board and anyone may try to answer.”

One by one, the questions tumbled out: Why does zero mean nothing? Why must two plus two always equal four? Why do we call a pen a ‘pen’; if someone gave it another name, would it still be the same thing? The stunned teacher had not expected such probing, thought-provoking, and certainty-shaking questions.

“There is one sin I have come to fear above all others: certainty. Certainty is the greatest enemy of unity; the deadliest foe of tolerance,” said Cardinal Lawrence in the film *Conclave*, and adds, “Let us pray that God grants us a Pope who knows how to doubt.”

Reflecting on the quote, I wondered whether the Ministry of Education and school administrators should also pray for teachers who know how to doubt and who can instil



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that same spirit of curiosity in their students.

Close connection
Certainty can hinder both thought and progress. Teachers who cling to certainty often resist challenge and discourage questioning. In doing so, they stifle curiosity, an essential quality that fuels fresh thinking, creative ideas, and innovation. Curiosity and imagination are closely connected and share many common traits. Curiosity prompts questions and drives the desire to explore, while imagination generates new ideas and opens paths to new solutions.

Sadly, our education system seldom values the

Encourage them to doubt

With Teachers’ Day round the corner, an educator stresses the need to celebrate curiosity in the classroom

nurturing of either curiosity or imagination. Albert Einstein once declared, “Imagination is more important than knowledge,” implying that knowledge is finite and limited to what is already known, whereas imagination allows us to explore possibilities beyond current understanding. It is a powerful driver of creativity

and innovation. Yet the teaching community seems not to have realised the value of imagination and the power of curiosity.

Those who doubt are often the most curious. They seek truth, question assumptions, and strive to grow. Teachers who embrace doubt encourage students to ask questions,

explore ideas, and think deeply. Curiosity leads to clarity. It sparks innovation. It deserves to be celebrated in the classroom.

In Jostein Gaarder’s *Sophie’s World*, Sophie, a curious young girl, embodies the spirit of wonder and shows how it fuels both self-discovery and intellectual growth. The book reminds readers

that, without the courage to ask “Why?” or “What if?”, we risk being trapped in passive acceptance of certainty.

Does our education system celebrate certainty while discouraging curiosity? Why is certainty valued more than curiosity? What measures can be taken to foster curiosity in children? Finding answers to these and other related, often unasked, questions can help educators cultivate their own curiosity and make the classroom a better place for seeking knowledge.

Why is it important for teachers to encourage students to doubt? How can teachers help students become curious?

Let’s assume that a teacher in a class made the following statements: “The Earth is round.” “I’m glad you are all very attentive in class.” “The object is red in colour.” Now let’s imagine that some curious students raised the following questions: “If the Earth is round, why don’t the people at the bottom fall off?” “How do you know I’m attentive in class and not just dreaming right now?” “Who decided that red should be called ‘red’? What if it looks different to you than it does to me?”

Constructive response
These questions challenge scientific certainty about gravity, raise doubts about the nature of reality, and question the certainty of language, meaning, and shared per-

ception. In such situations, a teacher should respond constructively so that children do not lose their sense of curiosity, instead use these moments as opportunities to develop reasoning, explore ideas,

A constructive teacher values questions rather than dismissing them. Even a simple “That’s a good question” validates curiosity. Instead of giving ready-made answers, the teacher can ask, “What do you think?” turning passive listening into active reasoning. Some truths rest on evidence (like gravity keeping us on Earth), while others are shaped by human systems (like language and meaning). It is also fine for teachers to admit they don’t know; saying, “Let’s explore this together” shows that knowledge grows through inquiry, not certainty. Above all, the teacher’s role is to keep curiosity alive.

A classroom blessed with curious students is like a garden of wonder, where questions bloom into creativity, innovation takes root, and the fragrance of new knowledge spreads everywhere. When teachers nurture learners’ natural curiosity, both teachers and students grow wiser and inspire others to think, question, and imagine. What a beautiful garden such a classroom would be!

The writer is an ELT resource person and education columnist. Email rayanal@yahoo.co.uk

SCHOLARSHIPS

Panasonic Ratti Chhattar Scholarship
An initiative by Panasonic
Eligibility: Students across India who have been admitted to B.E. or B.Tech. programmes at any IIT in the 2025-2026 academic year, have scored minimum 75% in the Class 12 exam and have an annual family income not exceeding ₹800,000.
Rewards: ₹70,250 a year for four years
Application: Online
Deadline: September 4
www.b4s.in/edge/RCSP6

NextGen Edu Scholarship
An initiative by EY Global Delivery Services.
Eligibility: Students currently in Class 11 who have scored a minimum 60% marks and have an family income not exceeding ₹300,000 per annum.
Rewards: ₹15,000
Application: Online
Deadline: September 10
www.b4s.in/edge/EYGDSII

DXC Progressing Minds Scholarship
An initiative by DXC Technology.
Eligibility: Women and transgender students in any year of a STEM-related UG degree who have minimum 60% in their previous class or semester and have an annual family income not exceeding ₹400,000.
Rewards: ₹50,000
Application: Online
Deadline: September 30
www.b4s.in/edge/DXCS6

Courtesy: buddy4study.com



OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am in the first year of B.A. Economics (Hons) and want to crack the Indian Economic Service but my college doesn’t provide proper education. I am relying on good books rather than the ones the college has suggested. My back-up plan is to take the UGC-NET exam. Am I doing the right thing? Adya

Dear Adya,

It is good that you are self-driven and working on the prep in the first year itself. Also, relying on standard, high-quality books rather than college-level material is the best strategy for competitive exams like IES and NET.

With regard to IES vs. UGC-NET, work on a cost-benefit analysis on which one you would enjoy more. IES officers play a crucial role in India’s economic policy-making and administration and involved in budget preparation, economic analysis, and programme implementation across various ministries and departments. You will need to do your Master’s in Economics or Applied Economics to take this exam. The UGC-NET exam will open up opportunities in teaching in higher education institutions, research positions, fellowships, jobs in think tanks, and banking.

I am doing an MBA in Finance and Data Analytics in a tier-2 institution. I am concerned by the growing emphasis on premier institutions when it comes to placements, exposure, and networking. How can I gain practical experience, build a strong portfolio, and grow my professional network? B.K.

Premier institutes offer

Find a balance

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

structured advantages (brand name, network, placement opportunities and so on) but carefully built skills, networking, and a strategic approach can more than close this gap. Work on building a strong portfolio. Freelance in data analysis, financial modelling, dashboard creation, or market research in startups, NGOs, or small businesses. Websites like Upwork, Fiverr, AngelList, Internshala, and LinkedIn gigs are great entry points.

Participate in online case competitions, hackathons, and business challenges. Kaggle (for analytics), Dare2Compete (now Unstop), and IIM/ISB-hosted case challenges are good platforms. Look for remote internships, and part-time consulting. Work on certifications and credentials across Finance, Data Analytics, and Business Analytics. Network on LinkedIn and engage meaningfully on posts in finance, analytics, consulting, and attend conferences and seminars hosted by CFA, CII, FICCI, or TIE. Look up people in roles you want and request a 15-minute informational chat. This method is highly effective but underutilised.

Broaden your job search beyond campus. Work on direct applications to firms (especially mid-cap, fintech, startups, boutique consulting, or analytics firms) and focus on roles, not brands. Your first job is a platform, not a dream role. Finally, share your learning journey, project results, insights from courses, and reflections on business problems.

Ph.D. I aspire to join the Indian Forest Service. How can I balance my research and UPSC preparation? Amal

Dear Amal,

Balancing Ph.D. research and UPSC preparation is a challenge but doable. Ensure that you set 5-6 hours a day for your Ph.D. work on weekdays and keep the UPSC prep to 3-4 hours a day. On weekends make the UPSC prep 6-8 hours. Use the Pomodoro Technique (25-50 minute study blocks) to handle mental fatigue. Also, do something small but hard from the UPSC portion before research (if possible) in the morning.

IFoS Prelims = UPSC CSE Prelims, so clear this first. Then IFoS Mains is separate with different optional subjects. Stick to smart study resources and use high-yield, concise materials. Use revision-first strategies. Initial reading is only 30% of the job; revision is 70%. Some weeks, Ph.D. will demand more, other weeks UPSC. Use micro-learning via Podcasts, YouTube summaries, revision cards during breaks and guard against burnout with deliberate rest, exercise, and social breaks.

I have a UG in Communication and Media, English and Psychology and a PG Diploma in Advertising and Marketing from reputed institutions. I’m interested in AI and media, but want a good work-life balance, relatively good creative freedom and good pay. Siddharth

Dear Siddharth,

Your combination of

media, communication, marketing, psychology is what AI companies are realising they need: people who can make tech human, useful, and understandable. Your versatile academic background and skills in content creation, strategy, branding, creativity, client management will be helpful.

Explore options in AI-driven content and creative roles like AI Prompt Engineer for creative tools (work with AI like GPT, DALL-E, MidJourney, Runway AI for companies doing AI-generated content, marketing, or design) or content designer for AI Products (write UX microcopy, chatbot scripts, AI interface conversations) or a creative strategist at AI startups (shape how AI tools are used for marketing, media, and storytelling). Other roles such as product marketing manager with an AI or tech focus, creative technologist, digital content producer for AI-driven platforms are also highly paid and creative.

Consider startups, tech companies, creative tech labs, edtech companies for roles. Upskill your non-coding AI skills with courses such as AI for Everyone (Coursera – Andrew Ng), UX Writing/Content Design (Google UX Certificate, UX Writers Collective) and so on.. Build a portfolio showcasing new projects and skills in AI-assisted content creation and publish thought pieces on LinkedIn/Medium. Network, follow, and interact with creators, product managers, UX writers, and AI ethicists on LinkedIn. Attend webinars, online meetups and conferences.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Go with the flow

How vibe coding is changing the way colleges approach hackathons and innovation challenges



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Tushar Dhawan

Consider a situation in which a student builds a functional app prototype in less than an hour by merely articulating the desired functionality, rather than composing lines of syntax-heavy code. Fuelled by a groundbreaking approach called vibe coding, this is the new reality unfolding across Indian campuses.

Vibe coding is the process of converting natural language prompts into executable code through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. It marks a major departure from traditional line-by-line programming, enabling a new wave of learners and innovators to participate in software creation without the steep learning curve.

Vibe coding has quickly become a cornerstone in the way colleges now approach hackathons and innovation challenges.

What it means
Vibe coding enables users to construct applications by outlining their ideas in a manner that is accessible to the general public. Various AI coding assistants

generate the underlying code automatically. The alleviates a significant amount of technical impediment and allows users to concentrate on user experience, experimentation, and ideation. It is particularly appealing to beginners and non-Computer Science students.

Critical skill
As software continues to power every sector, being code-literate is becoming as critical as being digitally literate. However, traditional coding education often requires years of training. Vibe coding reduces that timeline. AI coding assistants have been shown to reduce task completion time by up to 55%. As a result, students are allowed to shift from concept to prototype in record time.

Hackathons have served as a platform to evaluate technical expertise but now colleges are adopting prompt-driven models, where students initiate projects using descriptive briefs instead of code skeletons. AI then generates functional templates, allowing teams to iterate and refine quickly.

This means:

- Students from diverse backgrounds – business, arts, science – can now contribute to tech projects.
- Teams can complete MVPs ahead of time and focus on creativity, impact, and storytelling.
- Real-world problems can be addressed effectively

Multidisciplinary skills
Vibe coding isn’t merely about speed. By eradicating early obstacles, it enables students to participate in higher-order thinking, such as collaboration, problem-solving, and system design. This aligns well with the demands of the modern workplace, where multidisciplinary skills are prized. Students also become familiar with tools they’re likely to encounter in the real world with early exposure to AI-driven development.

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of vibe coding is its ability to democratise innovation. Students no longer need to be expert programmers to participate in the tech ecosystem. They simply need curiosity, creativity, and the willingness to explore.

The writer is Partner at Plus91Labs.

SAVE THE DATE

■ **Competitions**
HSBC India has announced the 12th edition of the **HSBC India Business Case Programme** for 2025-26. All UG students in the penultimate or final year across all streams can apply. Those interested can register as a team of four. inyurl.com/mr2ekv7p.

Green Gold Animation
has announced a nationwide call for aspiring writers to develop a new animated series for children. Open to students, aspiring screenwriters, or anyone with an interest in writing for children. Prior experience in animation is not required. Write to careers@greengod.tv

■ **Admissions**
Symbiosis International Deemed University invites applications for the Symbiosis National Aptitude (SNAP) Test 2025, an entrance exam for MBA aspirants, to be held on December 6, 14 and 20. **Eligibility:** At least 50% in Bachelor’s degree from a recognised institution
Deadline: November 20
www.snaptest.org

Vivekanand Education Society’s College of Architecture invites applications for the PG Entrance Test in Architecture (PGETA) 2025 for admissions to its Master’s in Architecture programme with specialisations in Urban Design and Landscape Architecture. <http://www.pgeta.in/>

The **University of Sheffield**, the U.K., invites applications for its B.A. Global Sustainable Development. **Eligibility:** 80% in Class 12 (all Indian boards) and overall IELTS score of 6.5 with minimum 6.0 in each component or equivalent. tinyurl.com/nyf59mx4

Think, don't search

How do we meaningfully educate minds addicted to digital saturation?

R. Jaya Pratha

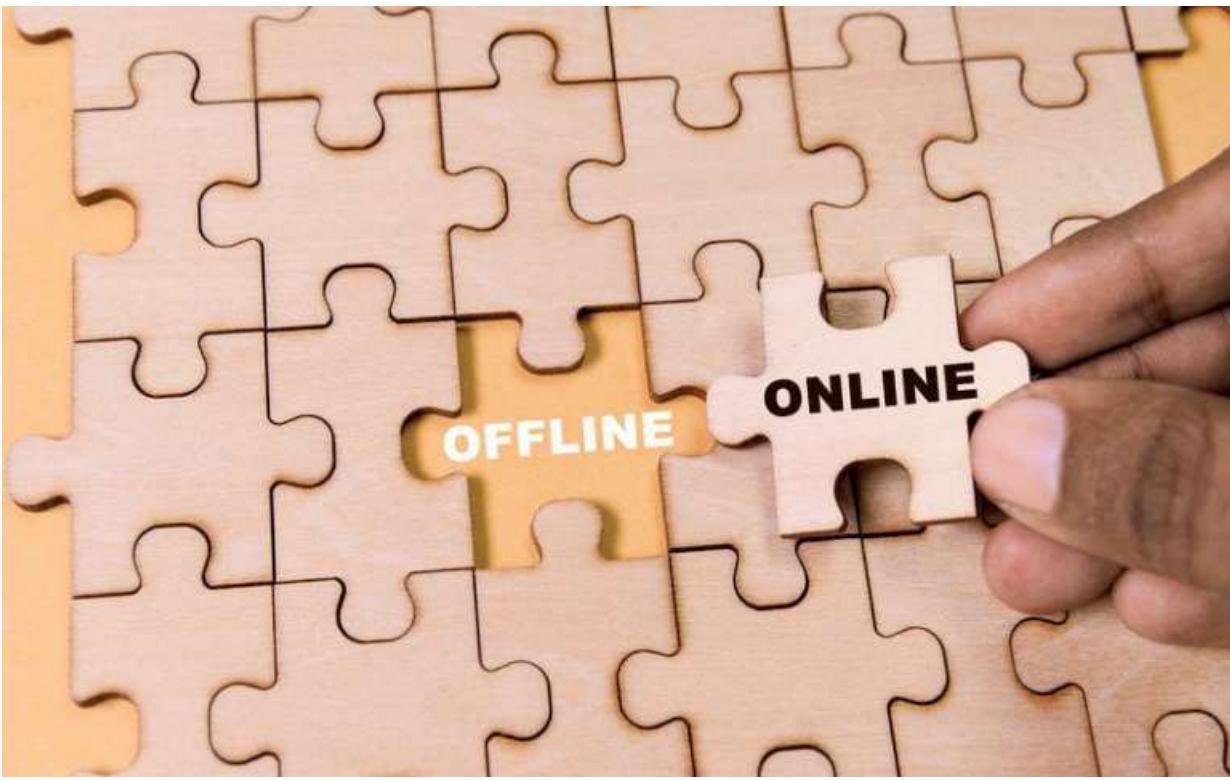
Brain Rot' is Oxford's Word of the Year for 2024. The phrase is a metaphor, which suggests a cultural lament for the subtle cognitive erosion wrought by relentless digital saturation. It refers not to the literal decay of the brain but to the gradual dulling of thought, the slackening of attention, and the outsourcing of memory and creativity to machines. In an era where information is always at one's fingertips, be it for media, research, commerce, or mere curiosity, there is a growing risk of mistaking access with understanding and speed with wisdom. Brain rot manifests

when our first instinct in crafting a research paper or composing an email is to search rather than think. It is not the tool that corrupts but our uncritical dependence upon it.

Current challenge

As a result, a pressing challenge now confronts the contemporary educational landscape: how do we meaningfully educate minds addicted to digital saturation? Though superficially informed, they are ensnared compulsive and routine content consumption. The result is a kind of intellectual complacency, a belief that everything worth knowing is already known, or accessible.

Today, learning is increasingly framed as a transactional endeavour,



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pursued not for its own intrinsic worth but as a means to an end such as the acquisition of marks, credentials, or digital accolades. Intellectual formation, the joy of inquiry, the rigour of analytical thought, and the reflective pause is now frequently subordinated to the expediencies of assessment and

employability.

In such a climate, knowledge no longer astonishes. Infinite scrolls offer connections seemingly abundant in content and tailored to the user's perceived interests. What emerges is not enrichment, but exhaustion. Here, the notion of brain rot assumes the character

of a lived cognitive and emotional condition that quietly corrodes the senses and sensibilities of the human mind. It dulls attention, erodes motivation, and atrophies the very soft skills that higher education claims to nurture.

This shift in attitude among digital natives can be refined through pedag-

ogy, which extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and cultivates skills including the capacity to navigate digital consumption with discernment. Educators must assume the mantle of resistance, crafting learning environments and instilling habits that prepare learners to remain hostile to

You are worthy as you are

Being aware of your inherent worth helps you recognise that every person, though unique, is valuable.



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THINK
Aruna Sankaranarayanan

Many of us grow up feeling we're lacking in one or more ways. Our sense of inadequacy may stem from multiple sources. We may not be smart enough, fit enough, fast enough, funny enough, rich enough, popular enough or successful enough. As a result, we feel incomplete, fragmented and even broken. Our days are spent trying to fill in the lacunae in our being. We strive to get more marks, more likes, more money, more power and prestige. Our metrics-obsessed society goads us to compare and compete, creating a perpetual sense of paucity.

Different narrative

What if the narrative we hear is different? What if we are told that each of us is good enough as we are? In a blog post on *Psych Central*, Kimberly Miller defines self-worth as the "value you have by virtue of being you". Further, you are not less or more valuable than other people. Regardless of who we are, where we live, what we have or what we do or don't do, each one of us is imbued with an inherent self-worth. According to Miller, when people acknowledge their self-worth, they are more resilient when faced with setbacks while also being able to savour the joys of life more wholeheartedly.

We need to plumb our deepest depths to fathom who we are. In *Unclouded by Longing*, Christopher Goodchild writes that we need to go beyond superficial constructs of the self "into the deeper reality of who you really are." We each have myriad identities that define our sense of self that may include our profession, nationality and relation to one other (like friend, daughter, colleague etc.). But these roles or identities are rather hollow. As Goodchild notes, "You are not a writer or a teacher; you are a being, *being* a writer and a teacher." It is this beingness, that is the birthright of every human being, from which our inherent self-worth springs.

Being aware of our inherent worth fosters a sense of connectedness with other human beings who are also worthy as they are. It helps us recognise that every person, though unique, is valuable. Differences between people don't threaten us because deep down, we know that "everyone is on an even playing ground," writes Miller. Even if people appear boring, mean or unlikeable, they too house a valuable core deep within them. Knowing this also alleviates pressure on ourselves to always appear likeable, cheerful and competent. We also become more forgiving towards ourselves and others. By appreciating our "shared humanity," we find it easier to extend compassion to our fellow beings.

Miller also suggests some strategies for you to activate your "awareness

and acceptance of your inherent self-worth." Try to find a core group of people who believe and love you, no matter what. Who cherish you, whether you fail or succeed. When others around you appear stressed, reassure them of their self-worth. By reminding others, you bolster your own "awareness in you." Being in nature can help you connect with hidden facets within yourself.

Deeper reality

You also need to be watchful of your social media habits. According to Miller, we only see "edited highlights" of other people's lives on Facebook and LinkedIn. Endless and mindless scrolling can exacerbate our deficiencies and insecurities. We need to remind ourselves that we share a deeper reality with others, that transcends all achievements and accolades.

Finally, we need to be more cognisant of our spiritual dimension. This may or may not necessarily be connected to religious experiences. As Goodchild notes, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." Ironically, connecting with our inner depths helps us forge connections with others. If everyone of us on this planet feels worthy and recognises the worthiness of others, the world will feel like the one large family it truly is.

The writer is visiting faculty at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and the co-author of *Bee-Witched*.

Nealesh Dalal

Fashion has never been just about fabric and flair. It's a mirror of society, defining oneself and pushing boundaries. What we wear is as much an expression of individual choice as of values, cultures, and the era we live in.

Yet, for long, fashion education has only concentrated on visual design skills and trend prediction. While these are essential, the world now needs a new generation of designers and thinkers who also care about people, the planet, and the systems that drive the fashion industry. This can happen only when fashion education gives equal weightage to social responsibility and creativity.

Negative aspect

While fashion is one of the world's largest industries – shaping economies, dictating pop culture, and touching the lives of millions of individuals daily – its influence isn't always positive. Sweatshop workers, environmental degradation, and cultural appropriation cannot be ignored. Educating the



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Beyond the runway

Fashion education must integrate concepts of ethics, sustainability, and social justice into its curricula.

next generation means equipping them with the tools to fix – not perpetuate – these issues.

Students today need to learn more than how to drape or draw. They need to know where their materials are sourced, who produces their clothing, and the message their work communicates. That requires integrating eth-

ics, sustainability, and social justice into the very fabric of fashion curricula.

Multidisciplinary

This also necessitates a multidisciplinary framework. At the intersection of Sociology, Environmental Studies, Anthropology, and Media Studies, students start asking stronger questions: Who's includ-

ed? Who's excluded? How can I make meaning rather than focus on novelty? Perhaps the most vital discussion in fashion is of inclusivity. However, learning must go beyond just identifying diversity. Young designers must acquire skills relating to diverse sets of identities based on various body shapes, skin colours, ex-

pressions of gender, cultures, physicality, and abilities.

In the last few years, fashion has become a tool of activism and raising awareness about issues of racial justice, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and the climate crisis. It can bring voices to bear on the silenced and marginalised. Learning can invite students to tap into this power. Assignments may be more than portfolio projects and can include cause-based campaigns or collections. Students can respond to a need, raise awareness for a social concern, or study upcycling and zero-waste strategies as part of their assignments.

Lastly, fashion school needs to change to build more than skill; it needs to build mindful creators. Graduates need to learn not only technical proficiency but also awareness and sensitivity sufficient to change the world through their work.

As we create our future, it's time to start building a fashion future that's anchored in responsibility, equity, and purpose.

The writer is Managing Trustee, JD Educational Trust.

Kadwin Pillai

Each year, lakhs of students appear for National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) with dreams of pursuing medicine. While many gain admission to colleges in India, a significant number choose to study abroad in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and the Philippines. But what many don't understand is the critical role the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE) plays in their journey to practise medicine in India.

The FMGE is a mandatory licensure exam for Indian students with foreign medical degrees who wish to practise in India. Conducted by the National Board of Examinations (NBE), it assesses whether the candidate possesses the minimum required knowledge to be registered as a medical practitioner in India. Despite being an eligibility exam, FMGE is known to be challenging, with pass percentages historically hovering around 10-20%.

In the next couple of years, the FMGE is likely to be replaced by the National Exit Test (NEXT), which will serve as a common licensure exam for both In-



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Journey to India

FMGE or NEXT are vital steps to ensure that aspiring doctors meet the standards needed to practise medicine in India

dian and foreign medical graduates, and the gateway for postgraduate medical education in India. Students who joined medical college this year are likely to take NEXT instead of FMGE. The nature of the exam may change, but the need for early and consistent preparation does not.

A common mistake aspiring doctors make is to

wait until their final year or after graduation to begin preparation. By then, they are often overwhelmed with internships and final exams. Starting early, ideally from the second or third year, offers several advantages:

Familiarity with the Indian curriculum: Many foreign universities offer strong clinical training and

exposure to diseases common in India. But the academic structure and assessment style may not always mirror Indian standards. Early preparation helps students gradually align their learning with expectations back home, avoiding last-minute surprises.

Incremental learning: Preparing over several years in manageable doses allows students to revise topics thoroughly, take mock tests, reinforce retention and track their progress

Stress management: Balancing medical studies abroad with steady prep ensures better performance across both.

Smarter use of resources: With time on their side, students can explore quality preparatory material, attend live or online classes, and seek mentorship, rather than relying on crash courses.

A key challenge for students abroad is the lack of access to India-specific coaching. This is where facilitators and institutions must play a proactive role by offering structured programmes, expert-led sessions, and regular mock assessments tailored to Indian requirements. Experts in FMGE and

NEXT coaching consistently note that early mentorship and blended learning – combining digital resources, personal guidance, and performance tracking – can significantly improve a student's chances of clearing the exam on the first attempt.

Students must start viewing FMGE and NEXT not as hurdles but as built-in checkpoints in the journey to becoming a doctor. This shift in perspective should begin even before admission decisions are finalised. Education counsellors and universities must also step up by integrating licensure exam awareness into their academic planning, whether through orientation programmes, preparatory assessments, or curriculum-linked study planners.

FMGE or NEXT are not obstacles but vital steps that ensure students meet the standards needed to practice medicine in India. For students choosing to study medicine abroad, the journey doesn't end with getting into a foreign university. It truly begins with planning for what comes after; and that preparation starts now.

The writer is Managing Director, Transworld Educare.