

EDUCATION PLUS

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"Education was transformative in my life"

Safeena Husain, founder of Educate Girls and winner of the WISE Prize for Education 2023, talks about how and why she helps girls to go back to school

Soma Basu
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Safeena Husain grew up in adverse circumstances. "Poverty, violence, abuse... my family circumstances were difficult," says the first Indian woman recipient of the WISE Prize for Education. At one point, she had to drop out of school. Her family was keen to marry off the adolescent girl. But, with the support of an aunt, Husain went on to graduate from the London School of Economics.

"Education was transformative in my life," she says. After working abroad, she returned to India in 2007 to found the non-profit organisation Educate Girls, which identifies girls between five and 14 years in rural and educationally backward areas and gets them into schools. In the last 16 years, Educate Girls has led 1.4 million girls back to school and has expanded its reach to work across Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Post the pandemic, a road trip across UP showed Husain that an entire generation of girls were being robbed off education. "Marriage was a cost-effective solution during the pandemic. We wanted to

create a second chance for them," she says. So the first phase of Project Pragati was launched in Rajasthan in 2021, with 300 girls between 15 and 25 years. In two years, 7,000 girls re-enrolled in schools with 61% successfully clearing the Class 10 exam in the first attempt.

In 2023, Husain won The Hindu businessline Changemaker Award in the Social Transformation Category and the WISE Prize awarded by the Qatar Foundation. Excerpts from an interview:

You have worked across four states for over a decade. What is the status of education for girls in India?

According to government figures, 66 million girls will not be attending high school and in 5% of India's villages, 40% of girls are still out of primary school. The enrollment rates have increased at the primary level but the problem has shifted to older girls, as the drop out rates going into secondary education are high. Girls are still battling with household chores, family responsibilities, discrimination and patriarchal mindsets.

What was Educate Girls' roadmap when it started?

There are seven lakh villages in India. I got a list of 26 red districts with a critical gender gap in education, of which nine were in Rajasthan. I started in 2007 with 50 villages in Pali district as a social experiment. Now we work in 25,000 villages across Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

What is your modus operandi?

We work in partnership with the state governments

leveraging the existing educational infrastructure to identify, enrol and retain out-of-school girls and improve their foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. We have a robust network of 3,000 employees and 18,000 volunteers drawn from the villages and trained in community ownership: My Village, My Problem, I Am the Solution. These gender champions do door-to-door survey, convince families and ensure girls are enrolled into the nearest government school and also help them with remedial classes in English, Hindi and Maths.

How challenging has it been to address the issue of

education disparity and social challenges?

We started our pilot phase in pre-RTE (Right To Education) days. We did not want to miss out on a single girl but access to people was difficult. Doors were shut on our faces, as parents felt their daughters were better off learning and doing household chores in preparation for marriage rather than wasting time, energy, and money at school. There are people who still believe a goat is an asset and a girl a liability.

How did the change come about?

After RTE came into effect in 2010, people became more

aligned to the thought of educating girls. Once we got that access, we could authoritatively ask people to send girls to school because it is their right. We could also give the girls extra coaching. We had to work differently in every region.

What is the difference now?

There has been progress. The drop-out problem at the primary level has shrunk considerably. But secondary education has new hotspots because the older girls are at risk of never completing their studies due to being over-age or married with children, or facing academic setbacks. However, compared to 15

years ago, girls are gaining confidence now and have aspirations.

Is that why you launched Project Pragati?

Yes. We found girls are vulnerable and take a lot of shame on themselves. The girl's education becomes the first casualty of any calamity that strikes the family, from illness to debt. We are helping older girls restart their lives by writing the Class 10 exam and following it up with ITI skills and training that will fetch them jobs of nurses, Anganwadi or ASHA workers, or schools teachers.

What do you foresee for the girls who fall off the education map?

It took us 10 years to enter homes and convince families. The mindset is changing, but very slowly. Learning has to be gender-neutral. But when you do not have the gender lens, girls get missed. If we have all the tools of their transitioning and equip our girls with education, then their transformation can be rapid.

Your work has won global recognition. What's next?

Never to lose sight of our primary objective: to enhance the access to and the quality of education for over 15 million children by 2025. To impact the lives of 10 million out-of-school girls over next 10 years under Pragati scheme.



Focus on quality education

T.G. Sitharam

Imparting education is vital but ensuring 'quality' education will make the real difference. For India, the need is to grow in each sector and in every aspect and to develop technical human resources of global standards. The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is determined to take every possible effort to uplift the quality of technical and management education in India and also to ensure that, by 2047, the country evolves as one of the main 'Global Study Destination' for its quality education.

With a focus on quality education, the AICTE has introduced and implemented various reformative measures at approved institutions to uplift the quality of technical and management education.

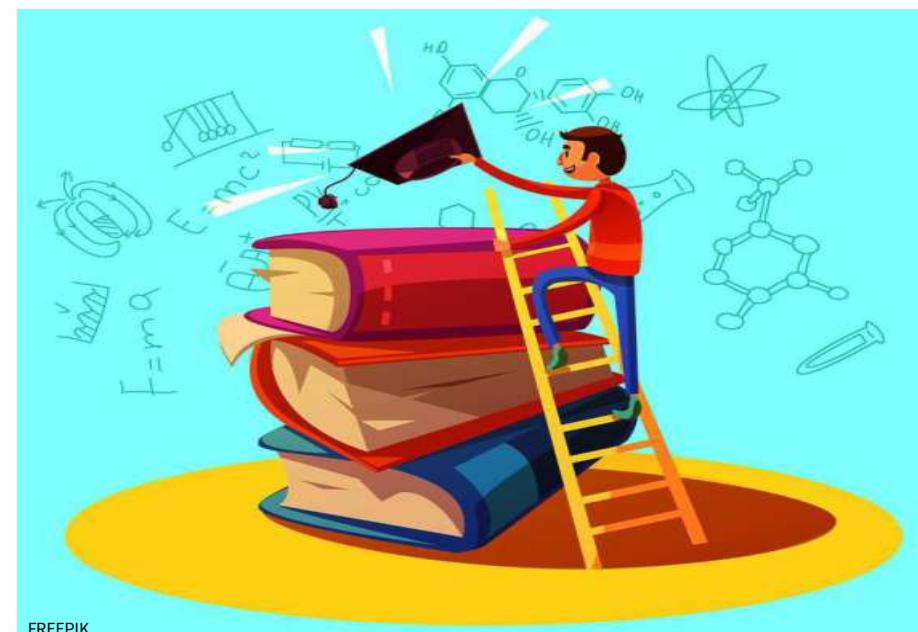
Procedure

In concurrence with the AICTE Act 1987, a major decision was taken to bring BBA, BMS and BCA courses under its ambit. In November 2023, after a detailed discussion with and assessment by expert committee members, the AICTE announced its decision to regulate these from the 2024-25 academic year.

For the first time, the AICTE also potted the draft of the Approval Process Handbook in the public domain to seek feedback. In coordination with the expert committee and stakeholders, the organisation analysed each norm and regulation so that the process would be easier and convenient for the institutions applying for approval.

This decision to bring the BBA and BCA programmes under AICTE has a broader vision to enhance the quality, relevance and competitiveness of technical and management education and to align the educational offerings with the evolving

Why the AICTE brought undergraduate management education under its ambit



needs of industry and society. This decision will also make institutions offering these programmes eligible for government funding, grants, scholarships and other forms of financial support that will enable them to invest in infrastructure development, faculty training, research facilities, and student welfare initiatives, all of which will benefit the entire academic community.

In the coming academic year, BBA/BCA institutions will be given approval on 'as-is-where-is basis'.

The AICTE will work with them over the next two to three years to improve the quality of their programmes by prescribing model curriculum of international standards, quality faculty development training programmes, quality improvement scheme, scholarships, and so on.

Benefits

The decision to bring institutions offering undergraduate management courses under the AICTE umbrella is significant, as the regulatory framework includes

guidelines for faculty qualifications, infrastructure requirements, teaching methodologies, and assessment processes. This will help the Institutions maintain the quality and credibility of their programmes, enhance their national and international accreditation and recognition, improve their reputation and increase the credibility of the degrees awarded, thereby facilitating academic mobility and career opportunities for students.

Once under the AICTE's purview, these institutions will be regulated, monitored, and standardised and the guidelines and procedures will reduce administrative burden and promote transparency and accountability in the education sector, preventing the proliferation of substandard institutions and ensuring adherence to regulatory guidelines. This ensures that the interests of students are safeguarded and the credibility of programmes is maintained.

Moreover, the AICTE, which fosters closer collaboration between academia

The writer is the Chairman of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

and industry, will ensure that students of BBA/BMS and BCA gain practical exposure to real-world challenges, industry trends, and best practices, which will enhance their employability and readiness to join the workforce. Another major factor to bring the institutions offering undergraduate management courses under the AICTE is to ensure skill development options for the students.

Also, the AICTE takes measures to promote the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country, will foster a culture of innovation and creativity in the institutions by providing support for research initiatives, incubation centres, and start-up initiatives. It will also empower UG Management graduates to explore new ideas, develop critical thinking skills, and pursue entrepreneurial ventures, so that they contribute to economic growth and societal development.

From ambition to achievement



OFF THE EDGE

Nandini Raman

I am in Class 11 (English, Legal Studies, Political Science, History and Economics). I am preparing for CLAT but not sure about pursuing law. What are my other options? Purvi

Dear Purvi,

You could consider a B.A. (Hons) in Political Science, History, or Economics to explore careers in academia, research, public policy, or international relations. Journalism and Mass Communication, Public Administration and Governance, International Relations and Diplomacy, Economics and Development Studies, Business Studies or Management, Social Work or Psychology, Environmental Studies or Sustainable Development, Public Relations or Advertising are other options. For Public Relations and careers in marketing, branding, and corporate communications you will need strong communication skills. Before you sign up for a course, consider your core interests, strengths, and long-term goals.

Research the fields thoroughly understand the scope and job prospects, and make an informed choice. Tailor your resume to highlight your transferable, relevant skills and experience related to supply chain tasks

I have a degree in Mechanical Engineering

SAVE THE DATE

Logo design contest

Maker Bhawan Foundation (MBF), a US-based charitable organisation aiming to modernise STEM education in India, has launched a logo design contest for the Vishwakarma Awards for Engineering Innovation. The winning entry will receive a

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

and am working for a private company. I had a chance to explore the Supply Chain and I now want to get into that domain. How do I go about this? Vignesh

Dear Vignesh,

Consider enrolling in online certifications in Supply Chain Management across platforms like Coursera, edX, or LinkedIn Learning. Learn the fundamentals including logistics, procurement, inventory management, demand forecasting, and distribution. Familiarise yourself with the key concepts and industry best practices. Identify transferable skills from your mechanical engineering background that apply to supply chain roles, such as problem-solving, analytical skills, project management, and attention to detail. Look for opportunities to get exposure to supply chain-related tasks. Assist the supply chain team or get involved in cross-functional projects.

Depending on your career goals, explore pursuing a Master's degree or specialised programmes in Supply Chain Management. Connect with professionals in the field. Join industry forums, and attend networking events. Tailor your resume to highlight your transferable, relevant skills and experience related to supply chain tasks

Who can participate:

All Engineering students across India

Last Date: March 13

<https://bitly.ws/3dQ4u>

Online programmes in hospitality

Les Roches has launched an online academy with Digital Certification programmes specifically tailored for the

or projects. Look for positions that allow you to transition into supply chain function roles like logistics coordination, inventory management, procurement, or supply chain analysis. Be open to learning new concepts, technologies, and industry-specific tools.

I am in Class 10 and plan to do B.A. Economics. Is it necessary to take Maths along with Business Studies, Accountancy and Economics in Class 11? Karthyayini

Dear Karthyayini, Maths as a subject in Classes 11-12 is not mandatory to pursue B.A. Economics. However, a strong foundation in Maths can be beneficial. Economics, at the university level, involves quantitative analysis, statistical methods, calculus, algebra, and mathematical models to understand economic theories, data analysis, and econometrics. It will enhance your analytical skills, problem-solving abilities, and quantitative reasoning, which can be advantageous in economics-related studies and careers. Check the specific admission requirements of the universities that you are interested in to see if Maths is a compulsory subject.

I completed my B.Sc. (Life

Indian market. These courses are Certified Hospitality Finance Analyst; Sustainability Specialist; Certified Digital Marketer; Certified Maitre D. <https://bitly.ws/3eDCZ>

MBA applications open

NMIMS' Pravin Dalal School of Entrepreneurship and Family Business Management has opened admissions for its MBA programmes in Family

Sciences) in 2019 and did my B.Ed in 2023. I have enrolled for M.A. Anthropology from IGNOU. I am thinking of doing M.A. Psychology next year. Is this a good idea? Jyoti

Dear Jyoti, Doing an M.A. in Psychology after completing your M.A. in Anthropology is a personal decision. Does it align with your long-term career goals and interests? Does pursuing another Master's contribute to your personal and intellectual growth or overall academic enrichment? Are you doing this for the sake of adding another degree or because you are interested in the field? How will this course complement your previous degrees? Do you think it balances your existing qualifications and enhances your current skill set? Assess the time, effort, and financial implications of pursuing another Master's degree to identify your personality and career path so that the courses that you engage in are connected and have relevance to your final vision.

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 edplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Business, Entrepreneurship and Family Business Management, Entrepreneurship, Women Entrepreneurship Programme and BBA in Marketing Management.

Eligibility: A Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognised university with minimum 50% aggregate. **Deadline:** Up to March 31, depending on the programme. <https://bitly.ws/3eDE4>

Global advantage

International exposure gives hospitality students a broad perspective and a competitive edge

Giovanni Odaglia

Hospitality is a global industry, catering to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and traditions. In today's interconnected world, international exposure has become a crucial aspect of hospitality education, providing students with valuable experiences and skills that go beyond traditional classroom learning such as:

Cultural exposure

Experiencing international environments allows students to encounter diverse cultures and traditions and develop a deeper appreciation and sensitivity towards different cultures. Engaging with individuals from various origins facilitates the cultivation of a global perspective, a cru-

cial attribute in the hospitality industry, where guests from all corners of the globe converge.

Language proficiency

Being able to communicate effectively with guests in their native language can lead to enhanced guest experiences. International exposure gives students the opportunity to learn and practise different languages, making them more sought-after and versatile in the competitive global job market.

Adaptability and flexibility

Working or studying abroad challenges students to adapt to new environments, customs, and ways of life. These experiences instill in them the virtues of flexibility and open-mindedness, which hold immense value in an ever-evolving industry like

hospitality.

Networking

Building a global network of contacts is beneficial for future career prospects. Through international exposure, students can forge connections with industry experts and potential employers across the globe, unlocking access to thrilling job prospects.

Communication skills

Effective communication serves as the foundation of the hospitality industry. International exposure enriches students' cross-cultural communication abilities, empowering them to engage with individuals from various backgrounds, comprehend their requirements, and deliver personalised service.

Best practices

Experiencing hospitality



FREEPIK

education in different countries exposes students to diverse approaches in hospitality management and service standards. This enables them to acquire valuable insights into various best practices, operational models, and service excellence concepts.

Hands-on experience

Many hospitality programmes offer internships and practical training opportunities as part of their international exposure initiatives. Through such hands-on experiences, students have the chance to work in real-world hospi-

tality settings, applying theoretical knowledge and gaining valuable insights from seasoned professionals in the field.

Global prospects

In a globally competitive job market, employers value candidates with a di-

verse cultural background and international experience. Such students are more likely to have a competitive edge over others and be able to secure opportunities for international placements and career growth.

Leadership skills
Working in multicultural environments challenges students to develop leadership and teamwork skills. Managing diverse teams requires strong leadership capabilities and a high level of emotional intelligence, attributes that are honed through international exposure.

Personal growth

Studying abroad for hospitality education pushes students outside their comfort zone, promoting personal growth, independence, and self-confidence. Navigating unfamiliar territory helps them mature both personally and professionally.

International exposure plays a pivotal role in shaping well-rounded and competent professionals in an industry that thrives on cultural diversity and global interconnectedness. Today, hospitality education with an international focus is not just an option but a necessity for those seeking to excel in this dynamic field.

The writer is Director of Operations and Student Affairs at Les Roches Crans-Montana.

Learn to unlearn

A person with a beginner's mind is genuinely attentive and intrigued by multiple potentialities.



THINK
Aruna Sankaranarayanan

Though the idea of babies being born with a "tabula rasa", or blank slate, has been discredited by psychological research, this construct – that was championed by philosopher John Locke – resonates with the Zen concept of *shoshin* or beginner's mind and holds value for learners of all ages. Even as we prize knowledge and expertise, every person, no matter how educated or erudite they may be, can benefit from cultivating *shoshin*. Like many Zen aphorisms, the idea of a beginner's mind is also paradoxical.

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities but, in the expert's mind, there are few," writes Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, in his book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. It is this openness to various options and alternative pathways that characterises the beginner's mind. In their book, *Teaching with Compassion*, sociologists Peter Kaufman and Janine Schipper aver that a beginner's mind embodies a "child-like" curiosity that is "primed for exploration and wonder". Instead of being hemmed in by a "right" manner of conceptualising, planning or proceeding, a beginner's mind is genuinely attentive and intrigued by multiple potentialities.

As cognitive neuroscientist, Christian Jarrett, points out in an article on

the web magazine *Psyche*, expertise is not an unalloyed blessing, as it is often accompanied by dogmatism and hubris. The history of Science is replete with stories of theories that are now well-established but were either ignored or lampooned by so-called experts when they were first espoused. Galileo, Wegener, Tesla and Chandrasekhar are only a few examples of individuals who championed ideas that were deemed ridiculous by authorities in their respective fields but were later proven correct. Jarrett exhorts us to acknowledge this tendency. Then, to counteract it, he coaxes us to ferret out "information and perspectives" that might oppose our views.

You may also cultivate a growth mindset that believes that people's intelligence, including your own, can be changed with experience. According to Jarrett, those who espouse intellectual humility also tend to have a growth mindset. In contrast, those with a fixed mindset think that intelligence is largely determined by your genetic endowment. Those with a growth mindset do not necessarily feel diminished when fractures in their understanding are revealed because they believe that they can learn and fill in the chinks. But those with a fixed mindset see weaknesses in their argument as a threat to their intelligence and possibly their identities as well.

Inject awe experiences into your life, recommends Jarrett. Whether it's admiring the variegated vibrancy of fish in a large aquarium or staring at a star-studded night sky or marvelling at the seamless synchronicity of a dance ballet, experiences of wonder tend to make people more humble and open. Finally, Jarrett reminds us that as *shoshin* tends to vary across situations, we cannot assume that we approach all facets of life with a beginner's mind. Rather, we need to remind ourselves periodically to remain humble and open and gaze at the world with a childlike curiosity.

The writer is the author of *Zero Limits: Things Every 20-Something Should Know & Blogs at www.arunasankaranarayanan.com*

Action points

Those who are intellectually humble, know more, possibly because they are open to learning and are not as fixed in their views. So, how can you cultivate and maintain a beginner's mind? Jarrett offers the following tips.

Most people tend to overestimate their own knowledge on varied topics from how a camera works to what factors precipitated the last recession. However, if we try to explain issues or topics to ourselves or somebody else, we may realise the lacunae in our understanding.

Next, we may play devil's advocate with ourselves. As humans, we tend to suffer from the fallacy of "confirmation bias", wherein we "seek out information" that corroborates our views and beliefs while ignoring or

ignoring or