

EDUCATIONPLUS

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A. Joseph Dorairaj

These days, words like ‘skilling,’ ‘upskilling’ and ‘reskilling’ reverberate in the corridors of higher educational institutions. The recent push towards skilling and vocational education has reignited the debate on liberal versus vocational education highlighting the academic-vocational divide.

Development

In 387 BCE, Plato’s academy in Athens – considered the prototype of a modern university – focussed on elenchus and dialectics. The aim was to train youth to be aware of inbuilt contradictions and inconsistencies in discourses and to direct their thinking in terms of contraries. Aristotle, an alumnus, continued this tradition with his Lyceum, established in 334 BCE.

In modern times, Wilhelm von Humboldt, the architect of Berlin University founded in 1810, proclaimed that a university had a dual mandate: teaching and undertaking research. The Humboldtian model of a university as a research-intensive institution is being followed in the West currently.

John Newman, in his *The Idea of a University* (1852) argued that knowledge is its own end. Liberal education, according to him, is the



“process of training, by which the intellect – instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science – is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture”. He pointed out that liberal education enables students to have “a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life”. He made a valuable distinction between liberal knowledge and useful knowledge, and correlated liberal knowledge with university education.

In recent times, India’s National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) categorised higher educational institutions into three clusters: research-intensive universities, teaching-intensive universities, and autonomous colleges vested with the power to award degrees. All three are called upon to focus on teaching and research, but at different levels.

Skills gap

Today, CEOs of reputed companies lament the skills gap in students despite them having gone through undergraduate (and, in some cases, postgraduate) studies and are desperate to close the gap to get hold of industry fit

workers. To achieve this, a generous dose of vocational education is recommended so that students are also trained in skills through certificates and diplomas in addition to their degree. The UGC document, “Guidelines for Introduction of Bachelor of Vocation (B.Voc.) Programme in Universities and Colleges under the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), 2015” mirrors this changing situation: “It has been a long-felt necessity to align higher education with the emerging needs of the economy so as to ensure that the graduates of higher education system have adequate knowledge and skills for

employment and entrepreneurship.” Accordingly, three skill development schemes have been introduced: Community College, B.Voc. Degree Programme, and Deen Dayal Upadhyay Kaushal Kendras (DDUKKs). Should higher educational institutions, especially universities, teach and pursue research or engage in skill development? While some argue that the Humboldtian model should not be tampered with, others point out that universities should meet industry requirements and focus on skill-development. A few others, adopting a pragmatic stance, point out that universities should do

both – teach and pursue higher-order research and also prepare students to secure gainful employment. Colleges and universities should train students to think analytically and equip them with the skills to translate concepts and ideas into action. This will ensure the connection between classrooms and the real world so that concepts and theories can be applied in real life and real-world issues are also discussed in classrooms for viable solutions. Job descriptions are vital. Let universities and postgraduate colleges relentlessly pursue research in addition to teaching. They should

not be burdened with skill development though students should acquire the skills of transforming and crystallising thoughts into action. Let Community Colleges, ITIs and DDUKs and, to some extent, undergraduate colleges take up skill development in a full-fledged manner.

But, even here, a dose of liberal education is required; for, ultimately, the purpose of higher education is to enhance students’ intellectual capacities. Diluting the mandate of higher educational institutions for short-term gains and converting them into skill developers and managers would be detrimental in the long-run. An excessive focus on skill development will eventually lead to an impoverished intellectual climate in higher educational institutions, especially in universities.

Different categories of institutions should adhere to their respective mandates and their roles and responsibilities should not be diluted or mixed up. An entire generation brought up largely on skill development may not be endowed with corresponding cognitive and meta-cognitive competencies, which would be a recipe for disaster.

The writer is Emeritus Professor, Gandhigram Rural Institute Deemed-to-be University, Tamil Nadu

SCHOLARSHIPS

Wells Mountain Foundation Scholarship

Provided by Wells Mountain Initiative (WMI). **Eligibility:** Those applying to or currently enrolled in their first UG degree and plan to live and work in their home country after graduation and show financial need. Prior participation in volunteering and a commitment towards it during the period of studies is required.

Rewards: Up to \$3,000 per annum.

Application: Online

Deadline: March 1

www.b4s.in/edge/WMFS1

Inlaks Shivdasani Scholarships

Offered by the non-profit Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation.

Eligibility: Open to Indian passport holders who have a first-class or equivalent degree from recognised Indian institutions and have scored 65% or equivalent in Arts-related subjects; and 70% or equivalent in Maths and Science-related subjects and have received a valid deferred offer letter for the current academic year and hold an English language certification.

Rewards: \$1,00,000 and other benefits (one-time).

Application: Online

Deadline: March 31

www.b4s.in/edge/INLAKS1

SBIF Asha Scholarship for Overseas Education

An initiative of the SBI Foundation under its Integrated Learning Mission (ILM).

Eligibility: Indian students belonging to SC and ST categories pursuing a Master's or PG course (any year) at a premier institution outside India and have secured at least 75% or above in their previous academic year. Annual family income should be ₹600,000.

Rewards: Up to ₹20,00,000 or 50% of course-related expenses (whichever is less)

Application: Online

Deadline: March 31

www.b4s.in/edge/SBIFS12

Courtesy: buddystudy.com

Develop critical thinking

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



OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am doing a B.A. (Hons) in Political Science from IGNOU. I will be the first graduate in my family. I wanted to pursue Law but couldn't get into the NLUs. I am considering pursuing an LLB from Delhi University. My main concern is job placement. Should I focus on preparing for government jobs? Also are there any scholarships available for students like me? Aditya

Dear Aditya, While a degree from DU can open doors to various opportunities in the legal sector, the admission process is very competitive and, even with a scholarship, it can be financially demanding. The legal job market is also competitive, and there is no guarantee of a campus placement.

Government jobs will offer and provide stability and other benefits but the exams are highly competitive and require dedicated preparation and time. The selection process is also lengthy and unpredictable. Preparing for government exams while studying LLB can maximise your chances of securing a good job.

For financial aid, check out the Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students as it provides financial assistance to meritorious students from low-income families. Many

states offer scholarships for students from economically weaker sections. DU and other universities may offer scholarships based on merit or need. Several private organisations offer scholarships to deserving students.

I am in the fourth year of B.A. LLB (Hons) and specialising in criminal law but my interests are in media and fashion. What are my career options? Should I consider pursuing LLM abroad? Puneet

Dear Puneet, Why are you specialising in criminal law when you are not interested in law or practising as an advocate? What do you want to do in media and fashion? Some potential career options are Fashion Law, Media Law, Entertainment Law or content creation related to fashion, law, or a combination of both. Other legal career choices would include corporate law, public policy, legal research, and legal journalism. Pursuing an LLM Abroad can enhance your legal knowledge and skills, and open up more career opportunities. Gain some practical experience through internships in law firms, media houses, or fashion companies to understand what you enjoy and would like to focus on as an eventual career choice.

After completing Class 12 (PCMB), I opted for JEE, DU JAT, and CA but did not succeed. Now, after much introspection, I have found my passion in Law. However, I am

unable to pay for the exam fees. I have tried reaching out to the CLAT and AILET teams for fee exemption, but I haven't received a response. I feel terrified and uncertain about what steps to take next. Mukul

Dear Mukul, Explore financial aid options across government scholarships, university scholarships (check college websites for specific details), scholarships offered by private organisations and trusts, and educational loans with flexible repayment options. Reach out to lawyers, judges, or professors who can provide guidance and potentially assist with finances. Join online communities and forums to seek advice and support. Consider taking state-level judicial services exams, which can lead to a career as a judicial officer. Explore State law colleges might have lower fees and easier admission criteria or a part-time LLB course or a distance learning option but be aware of the limitations of online learning. Develop your skills across legal research and writing, gain practical experience through internships at law firms or legal aid clinics. Stay determined, explore all options and don't let financial constraints deter you from pursuing your dreams.

I have a locomotor disability and am doing my BBA online. My parents want me to take the UPSC exam, as they believe it will offer me a life of convenience. However, I aspire to join an IIM to pursue an MBA.

Will my disability affect my studies on campus or limit my prospects when it comes to placements? What are my other options? Also, will my online degree be accepted for the CAT or any government exam? Astha

Dear Astha, Online degrees are valid if the university offering the programme is recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the programme passes the application college eligibility criteria. Contact the exam authorities for final clarification. Most IIMs provide a supportive environment for students with disabilities. Your academic performance and potential will be the primary deciding factors, even by recruiters.

You can also consider an online MBA programme, as many top-tier institutions today offer excellent programmes. Given your interest in business and management, you could choose to be a consultant, an analyst, a project manager, or a business development manager or start your own business and leverage technology to overcome physical limitations. E-commerce, financial services and education are some other choices. Network with professors, alumni, and industry professionals and seek a mentor who can guide you through this journey. Finally, stay positive and believe in yourself.

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

Make it interactive and engaging

An interview with British educator Claire Horsburgh on learning strategies for non-native English speaking students and why learning extra languages is important

Soma Basu

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Imagine a class full of children in rural Punjab singing their own version of ‘Kolaveri Di’ in classical Punjabi. “It is possible because they learnt the original Tamil song and its meaning without stress, and understood the song’s essence and its elongated drags to be able to produce their own version,” says British educator Claire Horsburgh. As she heard them amid a session full of laughter, fun and noise, it validated what she herself has been promoting for more than a decade now: the importance of learning another language, less often used at home, apart from the mother tongue.

On her part, Horsburgh has been reinforcing the core principles of English language teaching across India with Oxford University Press (OUP). “English can be seen everywhere in this country. It is the language of the world to get jobs and unlock opportunities,” she says. However, what should not be overlooked is that children require a foundation to be able to communicate in a language that is not their own and schools are usually the starting point, which require support. Horsburgh’s mission is to effectively cultivate multi-lingual students and teachers because she believes English proficiency not only has social and cognitive benefits but is also linked to educational level and social class. Her objective is to ensure the process of learning the language is interactive and engaging.

Horsburgh, who was in India in late 2024 to conduct her workshops after a hiatus following the pandemic, said that she believes that people across all ages and



strata take to a new language with ease when they learn by doing, and not just listening.

Global perspective

Her drive to promote English stems from the need to break barriers of cultural insensitivity. “When we study languages, it allows us to delve into different cultures and their history; it gives learners the ability to develop and have a different perspective and context. She also emphasises that, as global citizens, it is important to be culturally aware, understand different beliefs, and look beyond stereotypes to be able to build stronger international relationships.

According to a government survey of 2011, 10.2% of the Indian population speaks English as first, second or third language as every State promotes its regional language. “For a better and early exposure to English, schools have to rethink the approach of teaching because the younger students in particular are not inspired by learning rigid techniques, solely by a textbook,” said Horsburgh, who visited Kanchipuram,



Hyderabad, Kochi, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Delhi, Mumbai and Nagpur over the course of two months.

Horsburgh’s objective is to make the English classroom lively and enjoyable and she makes her workshop participants – who come from both private and government, rural and urban schools – sing, act, and read with expression various forms of English literature.

Horsburgh’s grandfather initiated the English book series for OUP, which her father developed and completed. She takes it forward by aligning it with the National Curriculum Framework now. “There have been big changes in the Indian education sector with a move to

wards experiential learning, activity-based tasks and cross-curricular integration,” she says, “and we are trying to make English completely culturally relevant.”

Beyond the textbook

It is easy for teachers to slip into patterns and just focus on grades, but Horsburgh’s point is to teach in an interesting way. “The textbook is just a resource; it should not become the only teaching tool with the focus on exams alone. A teacher should take the ownership and think about how to start a lesson refreshingly.”

She feels schools fail to motivate learners to engage with the curriculum based on joyful learning pedagogy. “Teaching English is still focused on reading, writing and speaking and not knowing how to use the language to communicate well. Teachers have to think about what their class needs, tailor their approach to supplement or scaffold and raise the standard,” says Horsburgh. It is all about active learning because fluency in languages and confident communication is the ultimate goal, according to Horsburgh.

