

“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

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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-schools girls over next 10 years under Pragati scheme.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The Tata Capital Pankh Scholarship

An initiative of Tata Capital Limited to support students from economically weaker sections. **Eligibility:** Indian students in Classes 11/12, or undergraduate or diploma and polytechnic courses at recognised institutions who have scored at least 60% marks in the preceding class. Annual family income must be less than or equal to ₹2.5 lakhs. **Rewards:** Up to 80% of tuition fees or amount ranging from ₹10,000-12,000 (whichever is less) **Application:** Online **Deadline:** March 10 www.b4s.in/edge/TCPS23

Quad Fellowship

An initiative of the Governments of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., which is administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE), a global not-for-profit organisation. **Eligibility:** Open to citizens or legal permanent residents of the above countries who are at least 18 years old and hold a Bachelor's degree or equivalent in a STEM field and demonstrate a record of superior academic achievement at the undergraduate level. **Rewards:** \$40,000 (one-time) and other benefits. **Application:** Online **Deadline:** April 1 www.b4s.in/edge/QUFD1

Courtesy: buddy4study.com

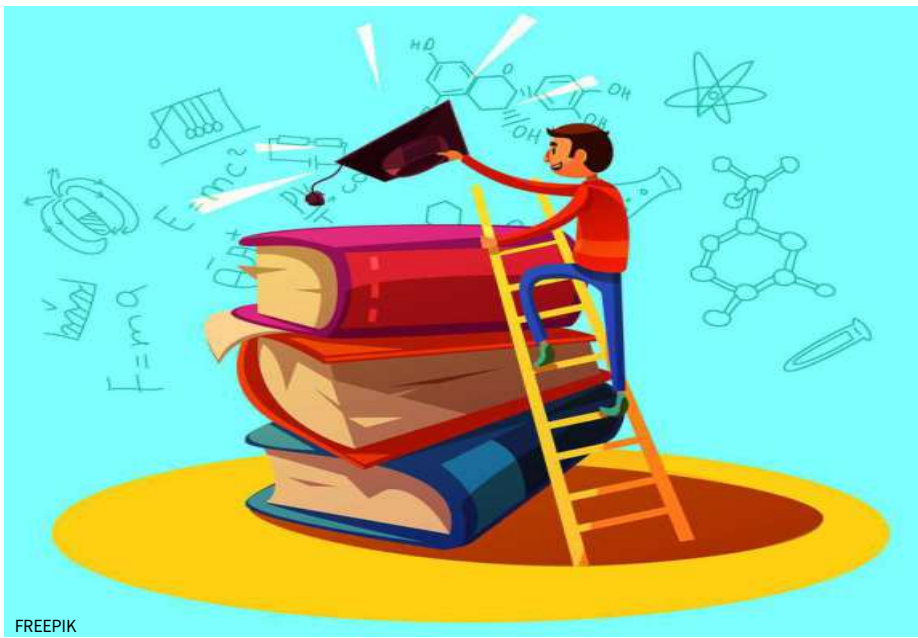
Focus on quality education

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 posted 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

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.

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



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.

I have a degree in Mechanical Engineering

SAVE THE DATE

■ **Logo design contest**
Maker Bhavan 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

prize of ₹10,000. **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 Maître 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? Jyot

Dear Jyot,
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. Ensure that it aligns with your professional aspirations and doesn't become redundant or unnecessary. I would also suggest that you get a career profiling done 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 eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Business, Entrepreneurship and Family Business Management, Entrepreneurship, Women Entrepreneurship Programme and 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>

MA-MAE