



# How Technology has changed the Way Education is Perceived in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the Importance of Soft Skills to be embedded in the Design the Education

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## Abstract

I have been deeply interested in studying education as a researcher for more than 2 decades. My journey started when I got involved in 'Hole in the Wall' experiments which was based on a new pedagogy namely 'Self Organized Learning Environments' (SOLE) and 'Minimally Invasive Education'. Before, I delve more into this pedagogy, it is important to look back in history to study how 'education' evolved over a period of time. It is fascinating to see a complete metamorphosis of the word 'education' and how context/environment plays a critical role in shaping it. What seemed relevant 'then' is no longer relevant 'now'.

**Keywords:** Self-Regulated Learners; Formal; Traditional; Creativity; Discouragement; Artificial Intelligence; Empathy; Ethical Behaviour

## Introduction

In earlier times, somewhere around 4 BCE in Mesopotamia, the word 'formal' education was coined which meant knowledge disseminated through word of mouth which later got captured in clay tablets to be passed on to future generations. The word "school" came from the Greek word "schole", which meant "leisure". Thus, education was considered to be an enjoyable activity rather than a chore. Unfortunately, today formal education is perceived as chasing marks and memorizing subjects to achieve academic excellence. It is more of a chore than learning for the sake of knowledge. The British schooling system brought a new wave as to how education was perceived. They were the first to introduce standardized national curriculum among other things. Their emphasis on academic achievement influenced education systems worldwide. Its influence was seen in many

countries particularly those that were part of the British Empire namely Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, New Zealand, to name a few [1].

In India, it met with resistance as its focus was on western learning, producing a class of Indians who would serve in administrative and clerical positions. Though, it served its purpose in early 19th century until mid-20th century, however, many eminent researchers called it the 'traditional' schooling method. Illich's 1971 book on De-schooling Society argued that traditional education was not effective as it forced students to follow a rigid curriculum and schedule, which killed creativity and curiosity. A similar sentiment resonated in 2006 when Sir Ken Robinson argued that the education system was outdated and needed to be reimagined to foster creativity and innovation. He felt that students were frightened of being wrong and were stigmatized for

the mistakes they made. In other words, it was more of a punitive method that instilled fear and discouragement among students. Robinson suggested that it was imperative to encourage individualization of learning which ignited curiosity among students and not dampen it. He also emphasized the need to reduce standardization of testing. According to him, education in United States encouraged conformity, compliance and standardization [2].

Interestingly, in 1999, Prof Sugata Mitra (Ted Project Prize winner of 2013), talked about breaking the barriers of conventional rote learning. His philosophy discussed bringing internet into examination halls making children self-sufficient learners [3]. According to him, self-regulated learners are individuals who actively monitor, control, and evaluate their learning. Prof Mitra's philosophy attempted to reboot the educational systems where learners should develop collaborative and research skills. An environment wherein, learners form groups to talk to each other, support each other and self-correct each other. An education system which self corrects itself. Learning is in the hands of the learner and not the teacher. The teacher's role is minimalistic and less intrusive. It is restricted to prompting and encouraging students to ask the right questions. His pedagogy saw its roots in the Socratic method of asking questioning, encouraging students to engage in critical thinking and inquiry. A view shared by many philosophers including Plato and Aristotle. John Dewey, an American philosopher and educator also highlighted the importance of reflective inquiry and the ability to question assumptions and evidence critically.

Today, technology, in particular generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) has changed the way we perceive and consume education. As educators, we should be willing to embrace technology by integrating it into the realm of education and reshaping the way knowledge is absorbed. Accessing information is just a click of a button away. Therefore, 'Just in Case' learning is no longer relevant rather learning should be 'Just in Time'. In other words, when the need arises, I should know where to look for the right information. I no longer need to store information as it is easily accessible [4]. Thus, the focus of education is preparing

students to teach themselves, to be able to differentiate what is 'appropriate vs inappropriate', equip them with skills like empathy, integrity, safety, privacy, etc.

Education is no longer about 'accessing information'; it is about 'how' we use the information. About the ability to discern correct information from incorrect information. Today, we are poised at a juncture where education should emphasize on creativity, inculcate ethical behavior, and answer the right questions, all of which is learner driven. Education today needs to be much deeper and more fundamental than ever before as it can have instantaneous impact on the learner both in personal and professional space. What differentiates an effective learner from an ineffective learner is his/her ability to access and use the right information that enhances the moral fiber of the learner [5].

## Conclusion

It is evident that the role of education has drastically changed, and it is extremely imperative to understand its context. It is not about longer chasing marks and memorizing rather its focus should be towards building the character of the learner through collaborative and imbining soft skills. Education now is 'asking' the right questions and being able to discern the appropriate information from the plethora of information via Internet.

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