

Should We Adopt the Western Educational System ?

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Though we have called it the Western educational system, it is prevalent, with minor variations, in almost all countries of the world, except in the countries of the Indian subcontinent.

We first examine the main features of the system and then consider the arguments against its adoption.

Main Features of the System

1. *Uniform free decentralized school educational system upto senior secondary stage.*

No fees are charged in any school; in fact free books and free transport to schools are provided.

Part of the expenses of the school are met by local educational taxes, and in return the local community has a great deal of say in the running of the school in its locality.

All children living in the neighbourhood of the school have to study in the school and no child who is not living in that neighbourhood can be admitted in that school.

Since children of all parents in a certain neighbourhood study in that school, all parents have a stake in the standards of the school and no person can even think of unfair appointments in the school.

About 80% of the expenses of the school are met by the state governments. This ensures uniform facilities all over the country.

The state governments act as watchdogs on the standards of the schools, but no state government official or politician can interfere in the running of the school because the local community will not tolerate it in the interest of its own children.

Quite a good deal of home work is done in the school itself under the supervision of school teachers and for the rest there is cooperation between parents and teachers.

In fact there are no heavy school bags because the books are given by the school and are kept in the school almira. There is absolutely no system of private tuitions of children by teachers or others. It is the joint responsibility of teachers and parents that students do well in their studies and, one result of absence of private tuitions is that teachers spend more time in working for professional organisations and professional groups.

School teachers have great freedom in teaching and use this freedom to introduce new innovative practices in teaching. School teachers are paid well and differences between the salaries of primary school teachers, secondary school teachers and college teachers are relatively small. Primary school teachers and secondary school teachers have the same qualifications, almost the same salaries and as such, a large number of teachers interested in teaching young children opt for primary school teaching, so that the foundations of education are well and truly laid.

There is absolutely no political or business exploitation of the school education system.

The pressure of work on students in schools is more than the pressure in our normal schools, but is much less than the pressure in the case of our public schools and other good schools. This is ensured by the uniformity of standards of schools.

2. *College and university education is costly and is given to only those who deserve it.*

While secondary education is a birth right for everyone, tertiary education is a right to be earned. The fees are so high that students have to either earn before entering the university or earn while learning or take loans and pay them later when they start earning. Most students consider it more honourable to earn and take loans rather than to ask for money for higher education from their parents.

Even then seats in all courses are limited by the facilities available and these are not increased under student pressure or to meet the ends of social

justice. In fact the question of social justice does not arise in higher education, after all students receive similar education for twelve or thirteen years. There uniform school education is a great leveller. In our country, we first increase inequalities in our society by providing grossly unequal educational facilities and then we try to reduce these inequalities by providing for reservations in higher education institutions and in jobs. In our country to talk of admission on merit, after education in schools with vastly different facilities and standards, is almost meaningless, since by and large only the students from the better off class do well and have merit. In this case providing of regulation of capitation fees cannot ensure social justice. Only uniform school standards with no political interference and schools with equal resources run mostly by interested parents and educationists can ensure social justice.

Teachers who teach also examine their students but the teaching and examination processes are all open. The teacher has to declare what he is going to teach in each lecture and he has to stick to it. The teacher has to show all answer books to all students, so that he has to be impartial. The teachers are also assessed by the students. This assessment is an important input in the promotion of the teachers.

There is continuous internal assessment with quizzes, mid-term tests, assignments, projects, so that students have to be alert throughout the year.

There are no made-easy books, no large external examinations, no papers out of course, no time wasted in declaration of results and there is intimate academic interaction between students and teachers. Students and teachers work for more than 250 days a year. Every student has a textbook for every course. The teacher does not teach the whole book but emphasises main points. The students have to read the rest of the book themselves and they also do supplementary reading suggested by the teacher. Students develop the habit of self-learning and a faith in their own capacity to acquire knowledge.

Libraries are well-equipped and computerised but what is more important is that these are fully utilized.

Every teacher has an office where he can study and meet his students with the result that a teacher stays in the college or university for the whole day. There is a common coffee room which teachers can visit for half an hour a day at a time convenient to them. Teachers are members of professional organizations and participate actively in their activities.

The utilization factor of a student's or teacher's time and energy is about 80% to 90% as against 20% to 25% in our country. For new appointments, all faculty members and even students of a department are involved and give their opinions after listening to the seminars given by the candidates and after talking to them. The selections are carried out in as open a manner as possible. Detailed reasons are given for all decisions made.

Due to this openness, there is faith in the fairness of the system. There are checks and counterchecks in the system so that nobody there can dare to defy regulations at all and there is almost perfect discipline and peace.

In this system, politicians cannot interfere and even academicians cannot dare to misuse their positions.

The government gives grants but it insists that universities must deliver the goods. No minister or officer can even think of misusing his position for his personal benefit. The government realizes that quality higher education is a vital necessity for the country.

However they put down tendencies towards mediocrity firmly.

Arguments Against the Adoption of System Examined

(7) Why should we not develop a system to suit our own genius? Why should we adopt any other country's system? It is against the dignity of a great country to do so.

(a) We have not hesitated to adopt their parliamentary democracy, their financial and economic institutions and even their dance and music styles. Why should we hesitate to adopt their educational system when we know that their system has delivered the goods and our educational system has failed.

(b) Most of our education commissions had made recommendations consistent with the system described above. These were all accepted in principle, but only a few were implemented in practice because others did not suit vested interests. We have to adopt this system in toto, otherwise vested interests will keep enough loopholes to exploit the system and to malign it.

(c) We had modernized our educational system by following the old British model. The Britishers gave up this model long ago. Why should we hesitate to give up this model now ?

(d) We had tried to integrate this with our Gurukula system and we have failed.

(II) We should not adopt the system because we all are corrupt and this system is based on trust.

(a) This is a horrible argument because it condemns a whole nation. The Europeans and Americans are no more honest than us and they know it. That is why they have developed a system over a period of time which forces everybody to remain honest. In that system, no body can dare to be dishonest; in our system, it requires courage to remain honest. There is nothing wrong with individuals, everything is wrong with the system we have adopted. When Indians go abroad, they work hard and remain honest. If Americans come here, they would do less work and become dishonest because the system allows it. We have to adopt their system because of its openness and its checks and counter checks which do not allow anybody to misuse the system.

(b) It is the external examination system with its secrecy and bureaucratic management system with thousands of rules and regulations which breeds corruption, not only in our educational system, but in our whole society through training in mass copying with impunity, through training in cutting classes and through getting marks by using influence and not by hard work and so on. Every student is perfectly trained in corrupt practices in his stu-

dent days. If we change the educational system, we will be able to change the whole society in a relatively short term, but we have to have faith in ourselves and a strong desire for quality higher education.

(III) It will be expensive and we cannot afford it.

This is a big unexamined fallacy. Today we are wasting 75% of our resources in education because colleges work for only 100 days in a year, students work for only two months in a year near examinations, students mug up answers to standard questions and do not acquire any knowledge. We have large number of uneconomic, unviable educational institutions being financially supported to serve political interests. If we can close down these institutions and use the funds saved to increase infrastructural facilities elsewhere and introduce a system which persuades every student to study and every teacher to teach, we can have international standards of education with only marginal increase in costs. There is also tremendous wastage in the educational system due to demoralisation of students and teachers due to interference by vested interests at every step. The politicians and other vested interests do not sometime even realise the tremendous harm they are causing the educational system and the nation by their trying to oblige friends and supporters. The new system will not need more funds, it will need a will power on the part of students, teachers, politicians and nation leadership.