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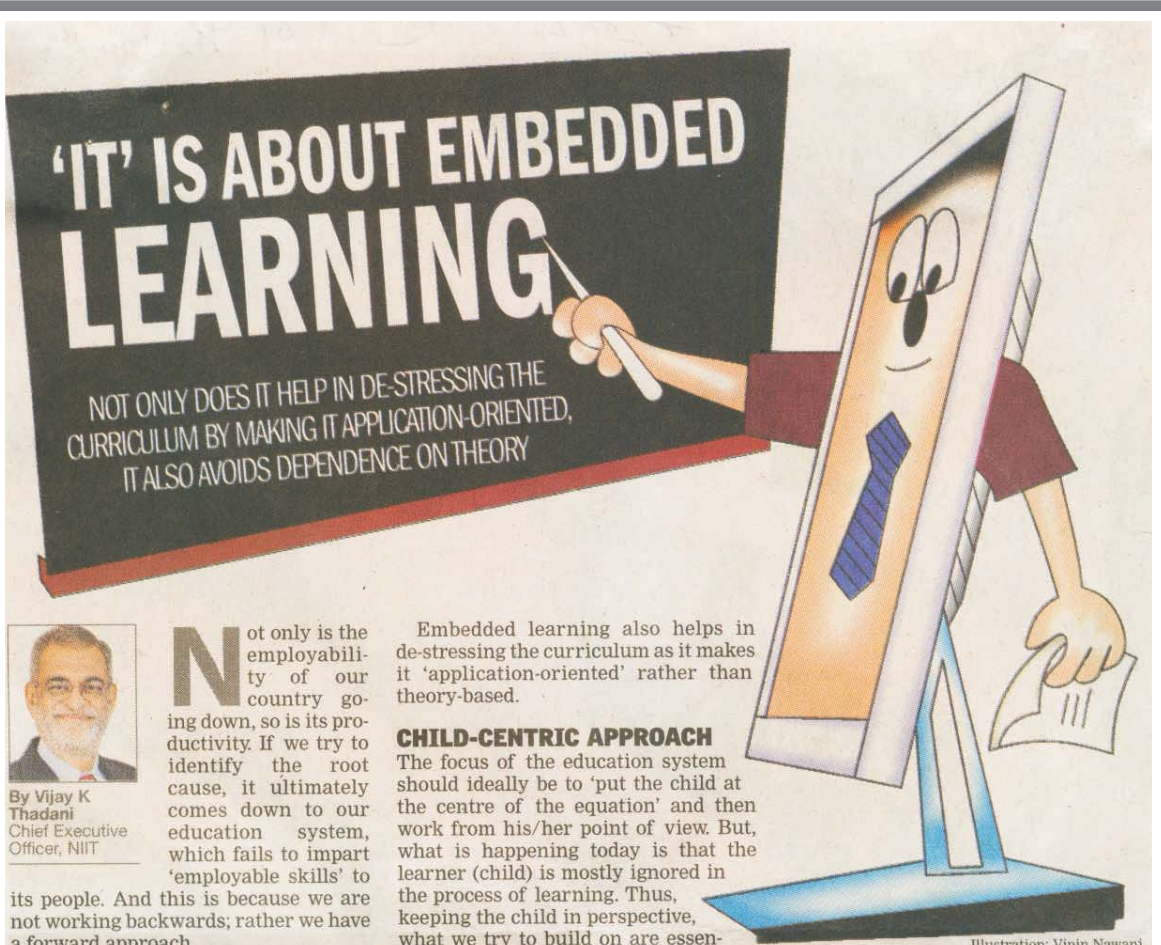


Illustration: Vipin Nawani



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Not only is the employability of our country going down, so is its productivity. If we try to identify the root cause, it ultimately comes down to our education system, which fails to impart 'employable skills' to

its people. And this is because we are not working backwards; rather we have a forward approach.

The words 'productivity' and 'efficiency' are mostly used in the context of commercial organisations but rarely with educational ones. But come to think of it, don't educational institutions need to be efficient as well? And if we put software in this system, we can make it more efficient — in terms of access and in delivery mechanisms to make learning effective.

ACTUAL LEARNING

To make a considerable impact, it is important to make education widely accessible to maximise its benefits, and this can be made possible through leveraging IT. And when IT is incorporated into the curriculum, it not only increases 'reach' but also makes it interactive. This helps in actual learning and all-round development.

As regards our school curriculum, it is neither current nor standardised. This is where information, communication and technology (ICT) can bridge the gap. With ICT in place, for instance, experts can deliver lectures to not only the few hundreds in a classroom, but to thousands, simultaneously and that too in a real-time mode.

Embedded learning also helps in de-stressing the curriculum as it makes it 'application-oriented' rather than theory-based.

CHILD-CENTRIC APPROACH

The focus of the education system should ideally be to 'put the child at the centre of the equation' and then work from his/her point of view. But, what is happening today is that the learner (child) is mostly ignored in the process of learning. Thus, keeping the child in perspective, what we try to build on are essentially those models and innovations, that are child-centric. This will make the child want to come back to school willingly. So, be it our HiWEL (Hole-in-the-Wall Education Limited) project or computer learning centres, children enjoy learning.

Simultaneously, 'consistency' of curriculum is also imperative. It is important to ensure that all children have access to it and this is done through building live multimedia curriculum, interactive classrooms, labs and so on.

Further, to achieve a 'skill-based' education, the focus should be placed on including vocational education in the curriculum after class VIII. The system should be such that it has exit points at all levels. After all, we don't just need expert technicians or engineers but also people at the junior-level, so that the system allows flexibility.

LAB TALK

For subjects like mathematics that most students are averse to, how do we ensure that it doesn't remain confined to tables or formulae? We need to make the subject come alive and this is what

we do through our IT-enabled mathematics labs. Similarly, we have science labs and we plan to launch language labs as well. In fact, every subject should have a lab to make learning more meaningful. Technology allows one to experiment and that is the key to learning, so it should be incorporated in all subjects.

We need to look at a child holistically and aim to create multidimensional personalities instead of one-dimensional ones. Also, why can't we have a few select entrance exams rather than burdening the child with hundreds of them? Besides, the education system is such that it doesn't allow a student to make career choices and instead seems to decide for them; this needs to change.

To sum up, there is a need for increased industry interface, need to promote competition in education to make it excel, need to provide skill-based education, need for privatisation, and finally, a need for transparency to bring in quality, access and equity.

— As told to Sakshi Khattar