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Role of School Libraries in sharpening 21st century skills of students

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ABSTRACT

Students as the human capital need to be empowered for the socio- economic development of our country. The pace with which the world is moving accelerates the need for a proactive outlay to evolve a strong, energetic and buoyant kind of learners who can meet the challenges in life and work. The skills required for the future workforce are totally different from what our students are acquiring now. Libraries, as an integral part of our educational system, can contribute much towards skill development, especially in schools. School libraries are centres where students can develop their skills through self- paced learning with the help of reference, research and intellectual recreation. Apart from developing reading and information skills, school libraries can impart training e- learning skills, digital literacy, technology skills and professional skills to work in library. Leadership and social skills of students also can be honed in libraries.

Key words: Skill development, Vocational training, Libraries, Library skills, Research skills, Safe search, Ethical use of resources, Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Young brains should be instilled with a lifelong learning perspective and ability to generate new and creative job solutions from an early age. Despite all of the advancements, India's skill education lags far behind that of other industrialised countries. If we are unable to provide a source of income for our youth population in the coming years, our development prospects would be limited. The new National Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisages the holistic development of our younger generation. It recognises the need to bridge the gap in present day education through technology and digitisation. The policy gives a strong emphasis on skill education in order to revolutionise our educational system. There is an urgent need to narrow down the existing divide between formal and vocational streams of education. To keep pace with the advancements of this highly competitive world, training in both life skills and vocational skills are to be made part of school curriculum.

Apart from developing the reading and information skills, school libraries can impart training in several areas that could help students succeed in future. It is associated with all forms of education- formal, informal and non-formal. Strong technological, research, analytical, leadership, problem- solving and vocational skills are some of the key areas where libraries can contribute substantially.

Objective

This paper highlights the importance of skill development and the part played by School Libraries in this direction. As NEP 2020 envisages, libraries as the focal points of every educational institution can contribute significantly towards the wholesome development of

students, especially in schools. 21st century skills are much relevant to keep pace with today's highly competitive world. Along with these skills training in vocational skills also can be provided in libraries. Although knowledge and recreational benefits remain the core feature, libraries have a wider reach and pivotal role to play. This purpose of this paper is to identify the core areas of skill developments where School libraries can make considerable contributions. It brings out the possible ways by which libraries can provide skill training for students.

Skills and its Importance
Skill development is an essential factor towards the socio- economic development of our country. If schools are able to provide 21st century skills like problem solving skills, critical thinking, communication skills, digital and media literacy, creativity etc., it shall prove to be strong foundations for the wholesome development of students. Equipping children with the right skill set would be the best contribution educators can do. Through this we are giving our students the opportunity to pursue their passions, develop specific areas of expertise, and obtain the skills necessary to execute jobs with higher rates of efficiency and in a time bound manner.

Skills or abilities that students need to develop in order to contribute towards the progress and development of their society and nation are considered as 21st century skills. In an information based economy such skill- sets are of utmost importance for collaboratively moving forward, creatively progressing and adapting to changes.

21st century skills are broadly classified as:
  -Learning Skills for acquiring knowledge
  -Literacy skills for gaining insight through a variety of resources available
  -Life skills to succeed in life and career

Why skills are important?
Vocational training and skill education are blueprints to a better future. Skills help to meet the challenges of a constantly changing world and to keep pace with the day- today advancements happening in the various fields. Skill education enables students to develop leadership, flexibility, accountability, adaptability, team- spirit and time management.

Library and Future's Skills
Library is the nerve centre of an educational institution where reading and information skills are nurtured. Good reading habits enable us to cope with new knowledge in this changing world. Judicious and effective use of information is an important skill students need to develop. Libraries are the right place where students can be trained in the effective utilisation of information available from both print and digital resources. A strong foundation on reading given at a very tender age will be an asset for them throughout their life.

Besides developing basic reading and information skills, school libraries can be good eco-systems for nurturing a variety of other skills that are essential to the overall development of students.

Digital Literacy skills
 In order to narrow down the digital skills gap and inequalities worldwide, the students need to be equipped with strong digital literacy skills. Libraries can give them training in skills like:

- Ethical use of online resources
- Basics of IPR, Copyright, and Fair Use
- Plagiarism
- Evaluation and authentication of information
- Cyber crime/ security tips
- Digital social and financial skills (professional and social networking, online banking, distinguishing fake news from real etc)

Technology Skills

Technology is gradually infiltrating every part of our day-to-today life. In order to strive for excellence in future life, students need to have strong technological skills.
   They should be:
- Proficient in applying latest technological applications in work and life.
- Know safe searching tips
- Understands Specific search strategies using Boolean Operators, Keywords, Credibility Search, wildcard search etc.
- Optimal utilisation of Open Educational Resources (OER)

Vocational Skills

Vocational training at school level is gaining much importance across the globe. Vocational education assists students in developing the necessary skills and gaining work experience in order to make a smooth transition from education and training to employment. The changing work patterns, socio- economic demands and rapid technological advancements underlines the need for vocational training at school level.

Present day libraries as multi- purpose learning centres can play a vital role in providing vocational training to the students. Training given in basic library functions can be very much beneficial for the students.

Librarians can train the students in:
- Subject genres and classification methods followed
- The basic library terminologies
- Arrangement patterns followed
- How to locate and replace books
- Accession procedures for books and periodicals
- Circulation procedures
- Stock taking procedures

How does it benefit the students?
- A key to pursue Library Science as a subject for their higher studies.
- To earn a part-time livelihood as a semi- professional in libraries in future.
- To have a better understanding about the practical aspects of the library functions.
- To enhance their research skills as they are closely associated with the library resources during their training.

Life Skills:

Learning is complete only when a student fulfils his duties and responsibilities towards his family, society and nation along with his commitments for self- development. Life skills acquired during his developmental stages help him to face the real world challenges in future. Life skills constitute an important part of 21st Century Skills. This includes such as...

- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Initiative

How Libraries can contribute?

Libraries can very easily take up the responsibility to engage students in several tasks and activities that may render effective life skills beneficial for them. Significant contributions can be made by training our students in various employability skills, soft skills as well as technology skills. These trainings can be imparted in different ways such as:

➢ Students can be divided into small groups to assist works in the Accession, Circulation and Binding sections so they will get awareness about the different tasks and activities of library which will helpful to develop Creativity, Flexibility and Initiative in them.

➢ They will learn about Leadership, Collaboration, Responsibility and the importance of discipline in life.

➢ By helping in Classification Section students will get familiarised with different subjects and keywords. It will also develop their critical thinking skills.

➢ Knowledge of classification will play vital role in Search and Research works during further studies. It improves self-study skill of students.

➢ Books shelving will make them aware about library arrangements and get chance to surf the collection of library. They will have a better understanding about book titles and authors.

➢ Stock verification of books will be an ideal tool to inculcate Responsibility and Respect towards library.

➢ Students will get an opportunity to understand the services like Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), Current awareness Services (CAS), Documentation methods, Indexing methods etc. All these will prove beneficial for their future studies and career.

➢ Newspaper clipping service provided in libraries is another area where students get training to utilise Newspapers effectively. They will know how to collect and preserve the important articles for future use.

➢ The use of technological tools in libraries help students to get an idea about how technology is revolutionising libraries. This helps them to have a different perspective about the functioning of libraries.

Conclusion

Vocational training and skill education are essential components in today's education. School librarians can make a significant contribution in this area. Libraries can be strong pillars to the educational system by training our students in various employability skills transforming them to a skilled youth force. By giving skills our students are provided with wings to soar new heights. Such contributions from the part of School Libraries and Librarians are noteworthy towards the nation building process.

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