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Education for growth opportunities

13 Oct 2009, 02:34 hrs IST, Ashwani Windlass,

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The recent meltdown has forced a new debate among rich nations — about missed economic opportunities due to an underperforming [education](#) sector. It has spurred a new vigour in official spending on education.



According to a McKinsey report, the current US GDP would have been higher by 9% to 16%, that is, \$1.3 to 2.3 trillion, if the high school pass outs had been equipped with the requisite skills. Strangely for us even as a developing economy, spending is not the issue, but educational reform is, if we want to spur our economic opportunity.

Despite an impressive annual \$55 billion outlay for education, India suffers from a double whammy of missing social and economic opportunities. A national average

dropout rate of 50% means about \$15 billion spent annually on education is unproductive, if not a complete waste. Each percentage reduction in this rate can add our GDP — some say, at least a 25%.

In spite of a mammoth spend, we continue to have large disconnects in our system that stymie [student](#) development. These force a mismatch between the student's developmental needs and economic requirements of employment.

Educational reforms need to focus on these disconnects in our system. Some simple yet far reaching take-aways from over two decades of global research across over 1,00,000 [schools](#), 300 colleges and 130 universities by MGRM, (Global Education Research ©MGRM 2009; recognised by ministry of science & technology) a global educational rehabilitation based research initiative, are relevant here.

This work suggests that education system should adopt a framework of continuum for all its key stake holders — namely students, teachers, administrators and alumni to address issues of educational reforms including regulation, capacity building and inclusion.

First, our education system must see a student as a continuum — from primary school to higher or [technical education](#) ie, until or even during or after employment. And it should not create any discontinuities at any stage.

The system must offer flexible entry and exit options with formal and informal choices. This implies that students be encouraged to take to vocations after school education. They need to be allowed to pursue higher education flexibly. This will ease huge peer pressure on students that cause much fear of failure and open education as a way of life.

Equally, jobs/professions must have options for affordable education and training at every step. Capacity building has to complete these gaps. Such a system will be more sensitive to student needs, inject vocational skill sets and let a student achieve what he wants to be.

This will also open newer opportunities in employment. For employers, it implies larger entry level choices. For students, it is an opportunity to learn in real life. Job experience along with higher [studies](#) produces far better productive outcomes.

At the policy level, this means that all parts of the ministry of human resource development — be it primary, middle, secondary, higher, technical or specialist education — need to work under an overarching mission to deliver education with quantifiable objectives. Today, these departments are independent silos with no shared goals.

Given the size and scale of the system today, student development at an individual level can be tracked. MGRM argues in its approach of 'from delivery to development'



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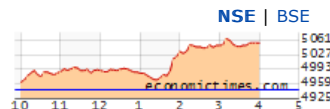
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that this tracking should be from pregnancy stage where the state already runs huge budget to support women welfare. The HRD ministry would need to implement a tracking policy here.

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