

General description of Utilitarian/ Vocational and Liberal Education

Social Sciences and Humanities

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Abstract

There are two types of education and I have tried to delineate and decipher the meaning of the two. Historical perspective and changing circumstances have also been given which indicate that in the beginning the emphasis was on liberal type of education. But with the passage of time and development, utilitarian education was introduced in universities and it became of paramount importance. The comments of luminaries on two types of education have also been excerpted which provide various shades of opinion. Since the tremendous development of Science and Technology, the liberal education has been put on back-burner and the top-priority has been given to utilitarian education, but to put the matter in a right perception, a case has been made to the effect that liberal education has its validity in today's world. As the liberal education has a civilizing effect and the culture, spirituality and intellectual prowess are embedded to it, therefore it cannot be ignored.

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Introduction

It is sometimes difficult to neatly differentiate between utilitarian and liberal education as many courses and topics overlap each other and at most places the difference is blurred. There has also been controversy since long that which type of education could be best suited to the times and which one should be assigned a secondary role. However, in today's world utilitarian education has an edge over liberal education for reasons of usefulness and progress. But a society also needs liberal education to uphold values, curious learning and freethinking.

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Utilitarian Education

By utilitarian education we simply mean the practical value of education or its utility and economic usefulness. Professional, technical and vocation subjects generally fall in the domain of utilitarian education. The utilitarian education aims at human needs such as food, shelter and survival and a country needs expertise for its industrial and agriculture development and poverty eradication. Such type of education also provides better job opportunities and can improve the material conditions of the people. A nation needs trained manpower and its human resource development which can best be provided by utilitarian education.

An important feature of utilitarian education is specialization which arises because of enormous progress and explosion of knowledge. Specialized knowledge is different from broad-based or all-round knowledge. Specialized knowledge necessitates in depth knowledge i.e to know more and more about less and less. On the other hand, generalist or broad-based knowledge can cover the surface of the subjects which may not be useful.

The flip side of specialization is that a man may be engrossed so much in his narrow field of studies that he may miss many important things in life. "Science in our age of specialization puts its practioners into a compartment from which it is hard to step out," says Linus Pauling (Alhaq, P-219). According to Sir Livingstone, it is dangerous when the specialization may not bring a student in contact with human nature and values (Hussain, p-56)

The distressing side of Science and Technology is the ever looming threat of nuclear war, toxic waste, Greenhouse effect, air, water and food pollution, health hazards and climate change. These issues need to be addressed and corrective measures are required.

Liberal education:

The word 'liberal' refers to that education which is appropriate for free human beings (Freyman, p-1). 'Webster's New World Dictionary' defines Liberal education as education in Liberal arts while liberal arts include subjects like literature, philosophy, languages, history and survey courses of sciences as distinguished from Professional and Technical subjects. Survey courses of science means looking at sciences in a comprehensive and general way i.e review them.

Freyman says that the Liberal education constitutes a particular set of disciplines such as Liberal arts, Humanities, the Social Sciences and natural sciences which are not primarily vocational (p 2-3) . Dr. M. J. Adler takes a broader view and describes Liberal Education as follows"

Liberal education is tied to certain academic subjects, such as philosophy, history, literature, music, art and other so-called humanities. In the liberal art tradition, scientific disciplines such as Mathematics and Physics are equally considered liberal, that is equally able to develop the process of mind (p 105-106).

However, Adler states that the aim of Liberal education is not to produce scientists but to develop free human beings (p-107). (Here it is pertinent to point out that Mathematics and Physics means pure, abstract and theoretical and not applied Mathematics and Physics). In pure Mathematics and theoretical Physics, research is expected to broaden and deepen our understanding of nature. (Pervez, p-216). Mulachy referring to the Aristotle says that liberal education is the knowledge which one seeks out of curiosity to enjoy (p-2).

Utilitarian and Liberal education in the light of changing circumstances:-

A country's education aims are influenced by its prevailing political, economic, social and religious conditions e.g once in Greece the aim of education was the survival from threats hence physical strength, courage and obedience was encouraged. (Khalid, p-67). The leading British magazine 'economist' gives an historical perspective of education and writes:

Before the utilitarian concerns, schooling was mostly for jobs in government or religion and the emphasize of schools was on character, culture and morality rather than skills. Eastern schools were inspired by the works of Confucius and sayings of Buddha and the West looked to Greek and Roman philosophers and historians, at least the elite class. For other people, Bible was the main text book. (The great learning, p-76)

Michael Allen submits certain thoughts of influential thinkers in an historical order and here are a few excerpts from it:

Aristotle was critical of vocational education and considered it as unworthy of a freeman. While Martin Luther said that the purpose of education was to meet the requirements of individual's vocation. In the Renaissance education was meant for all round development of individual and not vocational skills. Bacon in the 17th century stated that knowledge with empirical evidence was necessary for mastery over nature and betterment of human condition. However, up to the 18th century, no proper place was given to the scientific subjects. The idea of utility was strong in the 19th century but 'Paul Newman' rejected it and he wrote a book 'The idea of a University' where he favoured Liberal arts as the core subjects which entailed Literature and Science

combined with Philosophy. Newman also emphasized on Christianity in education. During Newman's time – the universities like Oxford and Cambridge were linked to religion. Allen concludes that broadly the Liberal Philosophy favors theology and humanities and the Liberal arts colleges emphasize on library and group discussion. While the vocational view has its support in sciences and professions and their home os laboratory (Allen, P 65-79)

Charles Eliot (once the President of Harvard University in the 19th century) followed the German system of higher education and introduced the professionals schools while in Germany Physics, Chemistry and Geology were treated equally with humanities in Universities. The graduate seminar, the Ph.D and student freedom were all German ideas (Ideas – 951). Charles Eliot also argued that if Liberal education is about freedom, then we should allow students to take whatever courses they want. (Freyman, p-3).

Various Shades of Opinion on Utilitarian and Liberal Education: -

The British Philosopher Bertrand Russel wrote on Mathematics, Philosophy, Morals, Science, and Education. Russel with Whitehead wrote 'Principia Mathematica' which was an attempt to reduce all mathematics to Logic. He addresses the question of Utilitarian and Liberal education, as follows: -

Without Physics and Physiology and Psychology, we cannot build the new world, we can build it without Latin and Greek, without Dante and Shakespeare without Bach and Mozart..... Nevertheless, there is another side to the question. What will be the good of the conquest of leisure and health, if no one remembers how to use them (Russel on education P 21, 22). By use of Leisure and health Russel means that they require intelligent activities otherwise they could be tedious. This implies that Liberal; education can best provide intelligent activities.

Russel on education further states: I do not suggest that humanistic elements in education are less important than the utilitarian elements. To know something of great literature, something of word history, something of music and painting and architecture is essential for the life of imagination to be fully developed (p-23). However, Russel adds that Science too can stimulate the imagination.

Max weber citing Leo Tolstoy says, "Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important to us: What shall we do and how shall we live?" (Gerth & Mills, p-143). According to Feynman, the problem of moral values and ethical judgments is one into which science cannot enter Therefore, meaning of life and moral values are outside the

ambit of Science and science is indifferent to them (p-120). M.J. Adler says that Science does not tell us why and wherefore of things nor it can prevent us from misusing the power which it provides us (p-16)

The civilizational, spiritual and cultural values have a special place in Liberal education. Sir Richard Livingstone in his essay 'Education and Training of Character' gives a very broad view of education and here is an excerpt from it:

The efficiency of a community depends on its technical and vocational education, its cohesion and duration largely on its social and political education, but the question of its civilization depends on something else. It depends on its standards, its sense of values, its idea of what is first rate and what is not. The vocational and social aspects of education are essential but the most fatal to omit is the spiritual aspect (Hussein, p-106).

The noted Social Scientist Erich Fromm says, "We find today a tremendous enthusiasm for knowledge and education, but at the same time a skeptical or contemptuous attitude toward the allegedly impractical and useless thinking is concerned 'only' with the truth and which has no exchange value on the market (Fromm, p -840). Fromm means that today there is emphasis on type of education which is useful for the purpose of market while thinking and finding the truth are looked with disdain.

Pervez Hoodbhoy says, "A modern graduate should be capable of scientific inquiry, be able to reason mathematically, have some understanding of culture and history, and be capable of coherent expression in speech and writing". Pervez further says: "The key point that makes a person with a university degree valuable is his or her adaptability. An adaptable graduate manages to find a niche in academia, industry, or elsewhere, because of broad range of interests and knowledge (p 236-237).

The Case for Liberal education:

Liberal education is undermined by much progress in utilitarian or scientific and technological education, the thrust of educational policy of any country is mostly on utilitarian education while liberal education has been assigned a peripheral role. However, many educators are of the view that Science and Technology alone cannot solve all human problems therefore they emphasize on liberal education, also. According to M.J. Adler, Science does not tell us why and wherefore of things; nor it can prevent us from misusing the power which it provides us. Science can be constructive as well as destructive (p-16).

The supporters of Liberal education contend that Liberal education is humanistic and has the capacity to help in character building, making ethical judgements, creating a man of wisdom and connects with higher human ideas through great books. Liberal education aims at enrichment (not in material sense) of human beings. Some people argue that good human beings don't need much instruction in Liberal Education as personality of man is fixed either by genes or environment. Feynman dispels this notion on the ground that to be a good human being, one needs some sort of effort and guidance which the Liberal education can provide (Freyman, p-14).

The three main aspects of Liberal education are (i) culture (ii) Spiritual (iii) Role of the intellectuals or intelligentia. Culture broadly speaking encompasses Sciences, religion and the social customs (foundation of education p-68). According to Leo-Strauss; Liberal education is in fact for culture or directed to culture and its objective is to produce cultured men and cultivated mind. (What is liberal education p-1). Therefore, how to live is an important aspect of Liberal education. J.N Kapur commenting on the role of Higher education emphasizes on its civilizational and cultural aspects and places vocational education as incidental and secondary (Higher education, p-7). Preservation and transmission of culture is an important function of higher education and cultural change has an important place in liberal education. The French revolution of 1789 with its slogan of liberty, quality and fraternity ended the dominance of culture of aristocracy and the European society gradually changed into democracy. (Ali p 17-18).

Spiritual aspects of Liberal education are of great importance while dictionary meaning of spiritual is the people's deepest thoughts and beliefs rather than physical surroundings. In addition to people's religious beliefs, the term spiritual also encompasses morality, meaning, values, beauty and love – purely non-material things. Man has spirit/soul and values and Liberal education deals with all the things spiritual. According to Russel, material things can be taken by force and one can be killed but not the things spiritual such as thought or art (Political Ideal p-11). Similarly Maslow says that education should take hold of spiritual and highest values (p-52).

Liberal education has the capacity to produce intellectual/intellegentia. An intellectual is someone who is enlightened with sophisticated ideas. Liberal education helps in building intellectual qualities in men like understanding, knowledge and wisdom (Adler, p-91). S.G. Mullachy says that an educated person, inspired by Liberal education, is an intellectual type and has the abilities to engage in thoughtful action. He possesses wide knowledge and is aware of citizen's rights and takes care of other (p-19). Intellectuals are generally members of civil society who fight against obscurantism and

broadly work in social, cultural and civil right movements. Writers like Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu who were products of liberal education played a significant role in the French revolution of 1789. In history, the European intellectuals responded to the challenges of the time which resulted in renaissance and promoted humanism, rationalism and enlightenment (Ali, p-125).

In short, we can say that liberal education emphasizes on theoretical, cultural, spiritual, moral and intellectual aspects of education and excludes utilitarian/vocational education. Intuition, wisdom, synthesis of ideas, aesthetics and curious learning have a special place in liberal education. Humanism, individual freedom, democracy, freedom of opinion, toleration, women rights and respect for minorities which have an element of liberalism are the part and parcel of liberal education. General ability, independent thinking, character building, cultured and sophisticated man and potential leaders are some of the products of liberal education.

Conclusion

There is a difference between two types of education- utilitarian and technological on one side and Liberal education (liberal arts and humanities) on the other side. As there has been enormous progress in knowledge therefore knowledge has been compartmentalized and one is obliged to opt for specialized knowledge. But the narrow specialist knowledge may restrict one's outlook and general understanding of important things in life. However, Specialist knowledge helps us in getting in-depth knowledge and mastery over a subject.

The economic usefulness of utilitarian education (Science and Technology) is mostly visible and tangible and it may help in providing food, shelter and survival and lead to development in industry, agriculture and human resource development. But technology has also its distressing side like nuclear threat, climate change, health hazards, etc. Utilitarian education may not enter into the realm of morals and values where the liberal education has an edge. Therefore, Science and Technology can be constructive as well as destructive, a cure as well as poison and it is not sufficient alone.

Cultural, spiritual and non-material things generally fall in the ambit of liberal education. The values which inspire our spirits are in fact realities but not physical and material. The Liberal education may not have immediate utility but it has the capacity to produce potential leaders and intellectuals who can spearhead movements like civil and human rights. The intellectuals can engage the civil society to fight against political and social ills and can mould the direction of society for a good cause. Liberal education can also

create a man of culture i.e one who is interested in literature, music and art and other interesting activities and thus enriches the mind.

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