

Educational Resources for School Students – V. Sasi Kumar

Education is – or should be – a process in which knowledge is exchanged freely. What we see is often (though not always) different. It has become a competition which, sometimes, even tends to become unethical. This is certainly not good for society, but is, perhaps, inevitable in a behaviourist paradigm. In the constructivist paradigm, which is now generally agreed to be better, the child constructs knowledge by itself or in collaboration with other children (social constructivism). Even in the existing system, we sometimes see students sitting together to study, where one student may explain something that another did not understand. In other words, sometimes in the present scenario or in a proper constructivist system, education is very much about sharing. And one of the aims of education has always been to train children to live in a society where they will have to share spaces and resources with others. Therefore, sharing and collaborating have an important role in education, as it has in life.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) makes sharing of information and knowledge even between individuals located far apart very easy in a manner unimaginable a decade or two back. Moreover, the technology permits people in different places to build resources, whether textual content or computer programs, collaboratively. Today, the education system offers a uniform meal (of knowledge) to every child, irrespective of the child's background or health. ICT makes it possible to customise the consumption of resources to suit the child's tastes and pace. Therefore, ICT can contribute significantly to improving the education system and to tailoring it to the needs of the child. However, the use of the technology needs to be closely monitored by the government in the same way that textbooks, for instance, are. The decision about what is to be taught cannot be left to some technology company.

ICT is perceived largely as a product of large multinational companies. As a consequence, the tendency the world over has been to get such companies to implement ICT solutions wherever needed. We often tend to forget that most such technologies were first implemented in a small scale, even at home, before large companies took over. For example, today hardly any child would know that bread can be made at home. Bread has become a factory product. A survey among school students in a major city once did show that children believe that milk is manufactured in the government dairy! IT also started in small labs, in garages. And they still can come from such places, and even people's homes, and it does. Wikipedia was built by millions of people from their homes for no remuneration, or even recognition. This goes to reinforce the belief that man is a social animal. Together, people can create great works. And educational resources are no exemption. People in various regions of India, or the world for that matter, can get together and create educational resources that are most suited for their region. And, with ICT, not only does it become easy, but also becomes easy to learn from each other. In fact, it would not be a difficult task at all to customise education to suit each student – customise content to suit his/her needs and the pace of learning to her/his convenience. No company can do this, just as no company can create an encyclopaedia like Wikipedia.