

## Navigating Indian Education System Towards 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Dr. Deepika Gupta<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Being able to use smart gadgets is not enough to succeed in the digital world, rather to adapt to emerging virtual tools. It necessitates the use of critical thinking, creativity, innovation, digital citizenship, and other crucial 21st century skills. Although the majority of students can use smart gadgets, they do not naturally possess the requisite skills. In order to successfully navigate the opportunities and difficulties of the 21st century, one must be a flexible and creative thinker who can keep up with the rapid rate of change. Such intellectuals are not being produced by India's educational system. The issue is not much with what is being taught to kids as it is with how it is being taught. Students must be instructed in the same way that we expect them to exhibit—creativity, collaboration, constant iteration, output-driven structure, and logic. The learning skills of today's students must be far more synchronized with modern technology. In addition to the usual classes, homework, debates, schools today also have the duty of educating pupils for the outside world and future careers. In general, the focus is on preparing pupils for potential changes in the coming years as well as on assisting them in overcoming problems and navigating social settings. Students who get guidance in 21st century skills can acquire both fundamental and higher-order skills. Additionally, it's important to provide knowledge to them that will enable them to understand many of the new challenges. Early education in 21st century skills could be a very successful strategy to try to close the gaps in India's education system's inability to teach both fundamental and higher-order skills. Even while other strategies are also recommended for filling these gaps, 21st century skill education is especially crucial in the Indian context. The nature, benefits, and applications of 21st century skills are discussed in the current study. The idea is aligned with P21's (Partnership for 21st Century Skills) six strands: critical thinking and problem solving, decision making, research and information fluency, creativity and innovation, communication and cooperation, technological operations and digital citizenship.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Critical Thinking, Higher-order Skill, Problem-Solving, Creativity

An ongoing advancement and enhancement of knowledge skills is necessary due to the quick accumulation of the most recent knowledge and the rapid speed of technological change worldwide. Students need to be well-prepared with the skills and competences to deal with a quickly changing learning environment in an increasingly diverse society that welcomes new technology and inventions every day. Schools, vocational training programs, and professional organizations are crucial to students' development of

<sup>1</sup>PGT Psychology

\*Corresponding Author

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cognitive abilities and moral principles. They are responsible for increasing students' ability to use critical-thinking and reasoning abilities in difficult circumstances. Students today must meet the standard for modern learning patterns, which is to adapt to emerging virtual tools. Additionally, it's critical to introduce pupils to 21st century learning and activities in order to prepare them for the impending problems. Teaching 21st century skills provide a solution to both problems. The early adoption of 21st century skills education is thought to change the game for Indian schools.

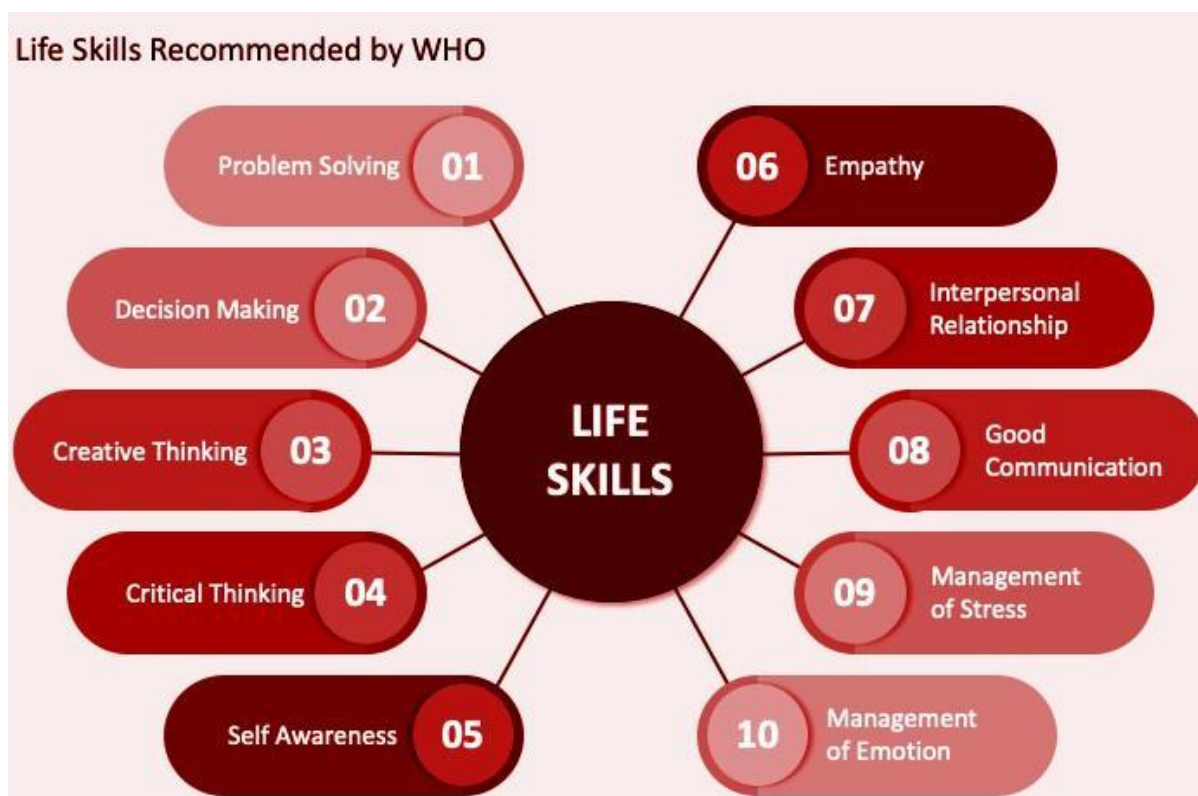
### *What are 21st Century Skills?*

The skills, aptitudes, and learning styles that educators, corporate executives, academics, and governmental organizations have identified as necessary for success in 21st century society and businesses are referred to as 21st century skills. In India the skills of the 21st century are defined as Co-Scholastics Skills and Life Skills which encourage teaching of higher order thinking skills through the core subjects. This is a part of an expanding global movement focused on the skills students need to possess in order to succeed in a quickly evolving, digital society. The mastery of skills like analytical reasoning, complex problem solving, and teamwork is the foundation of deeper learning, which is linked to many of these skills. These skills are distinct from conventional academic abilities in that they do not heavily rely on content knowledge.

Interpersonal, teamwork, and leadership abilities are becoming more and more crucial. These include personal, interpersonal, or learning-based abilities like life skills (problem-solving behaviors), people skills, and social skills. They are also known as "applied skills" or "soft skills".

Most nations in the globe have taken the significant step of adopting life skills education. According to the WHO, "life skills" are "the capacities for flexible and constructive behavior that enable the individuals to successfully manage the demands and challenges of everyday life."

Students will benefit from this by living a successful, productive life and by developing better social, behavioral, and emotional skills. 21st century skills, often known as life skills, are crucial tools that can assist students in assessing their own strengths and limitations and in developing sound knowledge and opinions about themselves. By converting information, attitudes, and beliefs into practical talents, these skills assist them in resolving challenges encountered in day-to-day life and promote self-awareness and mental health.



*Figure 1 - 10 Essential Life Skills recommended by WHO*

### *The Skills or Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21)*

Although diverse, the skill sets and competences that are typically referred to as "21st Century skills" have some universal characteristics. They are predicated on the idea that effective learning, or deeper learning, entails a number of educational objectives for students, such as the acquisition of strong academic principles, advanced thinking skills, and learning attitudes. This pedagogy entails making, collaborating with others, analyzing, presenting, and sharing the learning experience as well as the knowledge or wisdom acquired, especially with peers, mentors, and teachers. These skills are designed to encourage involvement in both students and workers. They include seeking out, establishing, and supporting connections to classmates, instructors, and larger audiences; creating/producing; and presenting/publishing. The classification or grouping has been performed to encourage and promote pedagogies that support deeper learning through both traditional instruction and additional methods like active learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, etc.

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The skills have been divided into three key categories:



**Figure 2 - P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning**  
(Source: <https://www.battelleforkids.org/networks/p21>)

**Table 1 - Overview of the Three Broad Skill Areas in the 21st Century Skills Framework**

1. Digital Literacy Skills	2. Learning and Innovation Skills “The 4 C’s”	3. Career and Life Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Thinking &amp; Problem-Solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility &amp; Adaptability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity &amp; Innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiative &amp; Self-Direction</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information &amp; Communication Technologies (ICT) Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social &amp; Cross-Cultural Interaction</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productivity &amp; Accountability</li> <li>• Leadership &amp; Responsibility</li> </ul>

Numerous of these skills are also mentioned as essential components of progressive education, a pedagogical paradigm that started in the late nineteenth century and is still in use today.

### ***Why is 21st Century Skills the need of an hour?***

- A student can successfully finish and fulfil his or her academic duties only when learning is complete and holistic, duties and obligations towards self, education, family, and society, in addition to all, the country. Enabling is to aim students of

today to be excellent citizens and a person of responsibility knows what he / she is capable of and competence.

- Simply teaching to the test or studying for tests won't prepare students for real-world circumstances. 21st century skills developing one's abilities is essential for dealing with children and adolescents the problems and worries regarding them. They go through a variety of numerous emotions, most of which are connected to their development and growth from infancy to adolescence and beyond.
- For children with special needs, these are crucial for fostering their independence in the contexts of their homes, schools, and communities.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There is evidence that interventions in 21st-century skills (life skills, digital literacy, and financial literacy) have positive outcomes and effects. According to Talreja and Krishnamurthy (2018), there is emerging interdisciplinary research evidence in India showing life skills are linked to successful results. The research analyzed by Talreja & Krishnamurthy (2018) and the authors of this study on the impact of 21st century skills intervention reveals the following evidence:

- **Improvement in self-esteem and confidence:** In addition to reducing negative behaviors, life skills training programs have been shown to significantly improve self-esteem, emotional adjustment, and empathy (Yadav & Iqbal, 2009; Rani & Singh, 2015). A digital literacy and SM Sehgal Foundation's skill-building initiative for rural Mewat, Haryana school children regarding a significant shift in their level of confidence (Saxena, Vaish, & Jain, 2017).
- **Motivation of students towards higher education:** An evaluation of the Akshaya Life's effects on student motivation for higher education Students' ability to define goals significantly changed as a result of the skills training. 98% of the students in higher education programs were discovered to be motivated (Akshaya Patra & Edumedia, 2012).
- **Impact on academic learning outcomes:** According to Subasree (2015), high school students in India between the ages of 13 and 15 benefit academically from life skills-based educational resources.
- **Transition to adulthood:** With the right 21st century skills, students can make a healthy transition from childhood to adulthood and are better suited to handle the demands and strains of a dynamic environment (Vranda & Rao, 2011; Rust, 2013; Kumar & Chhabra, 2014).
- **Girls' empowerment:** According to another study, life skills programs for girls are widely used in Rajasthan, Delhi, and Uttarakhand. These programs encourage goal-setting and individualistic decision-making in the girls, but they do not address the oppressive social norms that limit the agency of Dalit-bahujan girls (Arur & DeJaeghere, 2019).

### *Navigation of 21st Century Skills*

The skills that students gain in school today are vastly different from those that are needed in today's world. The emphasis has shifted from academic education to more all-encompassing, life-based or skill-based learning. This gap needs to be filled in order to be able to survive in this new environment and contribute positively, and what fills that gap are Life Skills i.e. 21st Century Skills.

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Good habits, age-appropriate responsibilities, civic virtue, and a sense of duty to one's community and country must all be instilled from an early age. Life skills are closely related to growth and development and can help students achieve later in life, whether it's in school, their employment, their personal lives, or their relationships. Children will benefit from learning these life skills since they will be able to concentrate and exercise some self-control. Additionally, it will improve the students' capacity for self-directed decision-making, communication, and comprehension. It helps students take on problems and develops their critical thinking skills.

Employers and educators concur that due to changes in the global economy, students entering college and the workforce must have a grasp of fundamental concepts as well as an advanced degree of skill in key academic fields. P21 believes that integrating subject-specific knowledge and practices with the 21st Century Skills listed in P21's Framework for 21st Century Learning is one of the most crucial approaches to help students acquire this mastery. Teaching and learning become more engaging, relevant, and demanding when a core subject integrates with 21st Century Skills, guaranteeing that more students have advanced levels of knowledge and proficiency in their specific fields of study.

**Table 2 – 21st Century Skills and Their Key Components**

Skills	Components
<p><b>Learning and Innovation Skills</b> - are more widely acknowledged as the factors that separate students who are prepared for the 21st century's more complex life and work circumstances from those who are not.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Creativity and Innovation:</b> In both individual and group settings, students use a variety of approaches to develop original and valuable ideas, develop, revise, analyze, and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts, and show originality and creativity.</li> <li>• <b>Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:</b> Students are able to think critically, apply systems thinking, and comprehend how different elements of a whole interact. They use both traditional and creative approaches to reach judgments, conclusions, and problem-solving.</li> <li>• <b>Communication and Collaboration:</b> Students are proficient in successfully expressing ideas and thoughts through spoken, written, and nonverbal communication. They employ communication for a variety of objectives in various teams and situations and listen effectively to decode meaning, such as knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Information, Media and Technology Skills</b> - People today live in a technologically and mediatically infused environment characterized by: (1) easy access to a wealth of information, (2) quick technological tool changes,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Information Literacy:</b> Students have the capacity to efficiently access, assess, utilize, and organize information for the issue or situation at hand. They demonstrate awareness of and use of knowledge regarding the moral and legal concerns related to the use of information.</li> <li>• <b>Media Literacy:</b> Understanding how, why, and for what goals media messages are created, as well as</li> </ul>

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<p>and (3) the capacity for unprecedented levels of collaboration and individual participation. Citizens and employees must be able to demonstrate a variety of functional and critical thinking abilities linked to information, media, and technology in order to be effective in the twenty-first century.</p>	<p>how various people interpret media messages, is known as media literacy. In a variety of multicultural settings, students produce media using the most suitable tools, traits, and conventions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Information, Communications, and Technology Literacy:</b> Students manage, integrate, assess, and produce information using digital technologies. They also effectively utilize technology by using it as a tool for research, organization, assessment, and communication.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Life &amp; Career Skills</b> - More than only critical thinking and topic understanding are needed in the life and work contexts of today. Students must give careful consideration to developing the following life and career skills if they want to be able to successfully traverse the challenging personal and professional contexts in the globally competitive information age.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Flexibility and Adaptability:</b> Expertise in adjusting to change in a variety of positions, jobs responsibilities, schedules, and circumstances; ability to operate well in an environment of ambiguity and shifting priorities; flexibility while negotiating and weighing opposing points of view to arrive at practical solutions.</li> <li>• <b>Initiative and Self-Direction:</b> The capacity to work independently and define and manage goals and time. The capacity to study on one's own and expand one's possibilities and learning beyond the requirements of a given curriculum or set of abilities.</li> <li>• <b>Social and Cross-Cultural Skills:</b> Utilizing social and cultural differences to generate new ideas, boost innovation, and improve work quality. effectively interacting with others in a respectable, professional manner.</li> <li>• <b>Productivity and Accountability:</b> The capacity to set and meet goals while dealing with opposing demands and pressures in order to get the desired results. Showcase extra qualities of high-quality work, such as multitasking, being responsible for outcomes, and cooperating and collaborating with diverse teams in an effective and polite manner.</li> <li>• <b>Leadership:</b> Collaborating with others to achieve a common objective while using one's own influence and problem-solving abilities, motivating others and utilizing their strengths, and acting with integrity and morality.</li> </ul>

### **Teachers' Professional Development (TPD)**

When the education system is recovering from the disruption brought to formal schooling and children's learning by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCERT's objective to prepare a "professional and humane teacher" is still important. Teachers were pushed to use technology to change the way they taught as a result of the deaths of loved ones, the unpredictability of parents' employment conditions, and the necessity to reach children and

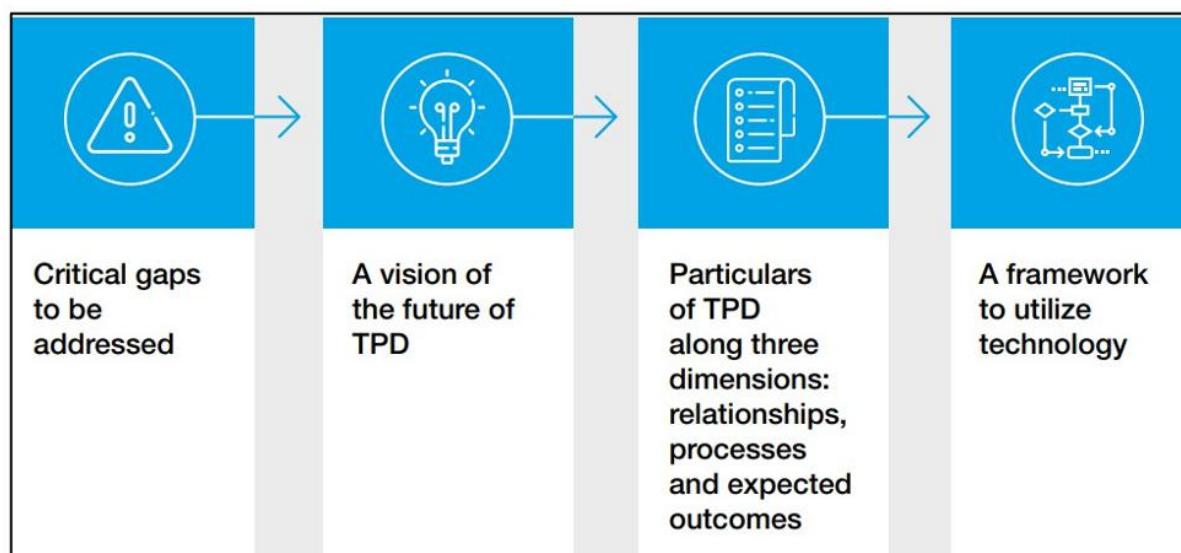
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their families in alternative ways. The long-term consequences of extended school closures and the resultant education shortcomings may be dealt with by assisting communities to address children's educational needs, which increases the extent of work of educators.

To create a meaningful path for the development of "reflective teachers," a cadre of competent, effective, and efficient teachers for the fast-evolving globalized society of the 21st Century who can instruct effectively in a variety of settings, worldwide communities have been working in a number of areas. To make this happen, teachers' 21st century skill development must be prioritized beginning with the teacher preparation process.

According to NEP 2020's requirements, each teacher must complete at least 50 hours of continuous professional development each year, according to their own interests. These initiatives "sympathetically encompass the most recent approaches to teaching basic literacy and numeracy, as well as formative and adaptive evaluation learning objectives, competency-based learning, and associated teaching methods (pedagogies), such experiential learning, incorporating the arts, incorporating sports, and techniques based on storytelling, etc.

Development of policies and programs to change the dynamics of teacher professional development (TPD) is therefore vital. TPD must be "systematically designed and imaginatively conducted" in every element. Teachers' training and professional development are essential to harness their participation in inculcating 21st Century Skills in school education from the early ages of the students. The below-mentioned picture looks at a few crucial TPD components.



**Figure 3 - Crucial aspects of teacher professional development (Source: World Economic Forum)**

## CONCLUSION

The entire globe has experienced a period of profound change since the start of the 21st century, whether it be in education, international trade and economy, society or technology. The Covid-19 recently Pandemic also presents difficulties for a person to handle its effects. Naturally, a different approach is necessary in these situations. It takes a certain skill set to enable an individual's ability to adapt to and overcome the difficulties of real life, resulting

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in his comprehensive advancement. These competencies are covered as Learning Skills/ 21st Century Skills/ Transversal Skills, etc. Consequently, the skills are the 21st Century Skills, something a human need for his or her own overall growth so that he or she contributes to the advancement and growth of his culture, country, and planet.

While many nations have already adopted and initiated several innovative policies and practices to empower their students with the 21st century skills, it is necessary that all responsible institutions or organizations should not only have a clear understanding of them but also collectively collaborate towards achieving the 21st century skills in each learner. Empowering students with these skills is another difficult task.

India is experiencing a demographic dividend because the bulk of its citizens are between the ages of 15 and 59, which is considered to be the working age range. The genuine advantages of a demographic dividend, however, can only be realized when young people have the necessary skills to actively contribute to the country's economic development. The low quality of education in India is a major obstacle to providing youngsters with the skills needed to become effective human capital since young people lack age-appropriate literacy and numeracy abilities. The India Skills Report 2022 highlighted that just 46.2% of graduates are highly employable (Wheebox, 2022). Even educated millennials lack employability skills. These results underline the need of encouraging young people from all educational backgrounds to develop 21st century skills.

Additionally, data from numerous research studies demonstrates that 21st century skills, including life skills, aid young people in improving their academic performance, mental health, and sense of agency in family and community settings. Such proof supports the value of 21st century skills for overall development, wellbeing, and youth empowerment.

### ***Implementation***

The 21st Century abilities are mostly a result of experience learning, which means that they are absorbed through seeing, understanding, exercising, and practical experience. Additionally, it provides the chance to connect classroom-based learning to interdisciplinary topics that are crucial for every student to succeed as a global citizen through an investigation of the subject's core principles. It gives pupils a prism through which to perceive the world in a unique way and equips them with the skills necessary for active engagement in our democracy and economy. In order to meet the largest issues in our interconnected, international society, students are able to learn new ways of thinking about the world and how to tackle old ones.

Thus, two elements essential for the implementation of 21st Century Skills in the teaching-learning process, namely - Core Subjects / Areas, and 21st Century Themes.

**Table 3 - Mapping Core Subjects to 21st Century Competencies**

Core Subjects / Areas	21st Century Themes
These include Native Language/ Reading, World Language(s) including English, Arts, Geography, History, Mathematics, Science, Government / Civics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Global Awareness</b> Work collaboratively and learn from people from many cultures, nations, religions, etc.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy</b> Boosting productivity and job opportunities, understanding the impact of the economy on daily life, and making wise personal economic decisions.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Civic Literacy</b> Staying updated on government systems and procedures, and exercising the responsibilities and rights that come with being a good citizen at municipal, state, federal, and international levels.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Health Literacy</b> Knowledge of holistic wellness, including appropriate diet, nutrition, exercise, and being free of stress.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental Literacy</b> Understanding the effects of daily activities, such as rising impact of pollution, population growth, etc., also to examine and evaluate problems influencing the surroundings to achieve the opinions as well as recommendations.</li> </ul>

**Recommendations for Education System**

All of today's educational systems have created 21st century skills. These skills, however, vary from nation to nation. Through the emergence and application of 21st century skills throughout Asia, some broad themes become clear. They are:

- Clear standards that outline the skills, competencies, and mindsets that students should possess at each grade level must be defined by education systems.
- To ensure that the future workforce is well-prepared to work effectively, school education must provide students with the essential workplace skills through curriculum and participatory pedagogical approaches.
- Teachers' professional development (TPD) must include training in the critical competencies and skills needed in the competitive modern world.
- The performance of students in 21st century skills must be evaluated in novel ways, and the connection between these skills and success in tertiary education, the workforce, and beyond must be followed.
- To give 21st century skills to prioritize government policies, must encourage and promote the teaching of life skills as a key part of the curriculum in schools.
- Role plays, games, maze-problems, group discussions, and other interactive teaching methods must be used in schools to keep students actively participating in life skills education.

### ***Recommendations for Teachers***

Teachers should / must -

- have an in-depth understanding of the framework for the curriculum and the ability to make it relevant through generative topics / issues like gender disparity, women's empowerment, adult education, e-governance, etc., which would help students connect to the real world around them,
- create teaching methods or exercises that force students to apply their learned knowledge in novel ways. This will encourage students to engage in collaborative, inquiry-based learning,
- be able to attain the learning objectives, educators should be able to recognize the relationship between interdisciplinary themes and generic skills and be able to integrate across and within the core topics,
- get rid of the transmission framework, which involves imparting factual knowledge through lectures and textbooks and then assessing it through understanding that is dependent on memory. be sure that their instructions progress from being about "knowing" information to being about "applying" knowledge,
- join professional development programs that enable the application of 21st century skills and abilities to stay up to date,
- be capable of identifying, developing, and evaluating students' performance in these skills,
- be trained in using technology as an effective instrument and learning resource to promote classroom learning.

In the end, India needs more creators if initiatives like Make in India are to be successful. Therefore, we need to make a substantial investment reform in how we build our human capital. This transformation might be sparked by a successful initiative to teach students 21st-century skills.

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