
A Critical Examination of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's Vision for Practical Educational Reform in “You Are Born to Blossom”

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Abstract: Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's learning vision for practical educational reform is to pay attention to the term and know what he actually means by it, "true leaders". Through creative form of expression and mind led forward by the desires of internal self, forms the true leaders which are considered as an important resource not just for the nation but its people and community. Unlike rote learning, present in the traditional form of education which only focused on following established patterns and not more than that. Creative and practical educational reform fosters independent thinkers capable of establishing new paths and inspiring others to rise above the current level of their comprehension and explore the unknown with their innovative mindset. According to A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, leadership qualities in one emerges not from memorizing leadership theories but from developing the capability to visualize new possibilities and take calculated risks, adapting to the changing circumstances, and implementing practical solutions to such challenges that lay in front of oneself. Leadership is an attitude, a positive one, that connects Kalam's learning philosophy with his broader vision for national development, that contributes in the effect of national development, influencing creative and practical education that acts as an essential foundation for cultivating the visionary leaders of today, necessary for representing our nation India through its advancement in spiritual and technical field on the global level.

Keywords: True leaders, Rote learning, educational reform, innovative mindset, leadership theories, national development.

Introduction: Practical form of education influences the minds to understand the work present in front of us, forming a more enhanced version of visualized learning and gain insights from it. He emphasizes the importance of the learning that occurs through direct engagement with real- world contexts and day to day challenges rather than abstract memorization of disconnected facts or the theories performed by some other theorist which serves up to the academic level. Dr. Kalam advocates his students for learning approaches that are filled with

theory with practice involved in it, allowing students to apply their comprehensible knowledge in meaningful contexts, elevating their performance in every domain they aspire. According to Dr. Kalam, teachers should provide a "theoretical lesson coupled with live practical examples available in nature," making abstract concepts more concrete and relevant through its applications in real-world. This practical knowledge composition by Dr. Kalam is gained through his years of experience and his contribution to the nation as a scientist and engineer who valued practical outcomes over theoretical knowledge. For Dr. Kalam, education achieves its highest peak or serves its pivotal purpose when it enables students to differentiate between knowing and doing, that is the, theoretical understanding and practical application of knowledge.

Later Kalam argues that the particular set of theories and concepts instilled in the minds of students through a systematic form of rules i.e., rote learning, actually fails to recognize the young and diverse talents of students. It is basically unaware of the capabilities one holds when they are put in the environment which compel them to come up with one's own ideas and concepts other than the lesson plan informed to us. He observes that the earlier traditional education systems, which is still prevalent in schools and institutions, often emphasizes on the primary knowledge gain that can only happen through academic excellence resulting in one's success, which is absolutely wrong and it only discourages the creative mindset of student who cannot perform well in their academics. It basically imposes arbitrary constraints on learning, forcing the students to only follow a predefined pattern rather than exploring their own capabilities and potential. According to Kalam, this not only limits individual potential but also impacts the creativity and innovation that are essential for national progress. He stresses that schools and colleges and various educational institutions should create certain environments that works in the favor of individuals providing them support. Henceforth allowing different types of abilities to flourish, rather than imposing a uniform pattern of learning on all students regardless of their thoughts, distinct capabilities and interests.

Critique of Rote Learning vs. Creative and Practical Education: In the book "You Are Born to Blossom" by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, he critiques on the educational system of rote learning, which he identifies as a fundamental limitation of traditional education systems in India. He argues that excessive emphasis on sole memorization without practicality or deeper understanding of its application has led to the generations of students who possess information but lack in the application of that knowledge in the real-world problems. Such approaches treat students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than being an active participant in the learning process, halting their curiosity, critical thinking, and innovative capacity. Kalam states that the education system based on rote learning is ill-suited for the contemporary India, which shows no sign of analytical thinking, and creative problem-solving based on various contexts. In contrast to rote learning, Kalam proposes the beauty of creativity and novelty in the education system. He believes that creativity fosters imagination, exploring the boundlessness of possibilities. Kalam suggests that schools and colleges should encourage students to explore the unconventional ideas and concepts. Conditioning with endless experimentation with the perceived concepts. Also, failure is considered as an essential component learning process, as

one who has never tried distinct possibilities outside their comfort zone might avoid practical learning and experimentation due to fear of failure, leaving one to be constrained around their level of proximity. This perspective challenges correct answers over exploratory thinking and punish mistakes rather than recognizing them as a valuable learning opportunity. For Kalam, creativity is not just an aspect of education but its fundamental purpose is to enable students to explore new possibilities, challenge the existing assumptions.

Dr. Kalam as an engineer and scientist himself advocates the importance of learning approaches that integrate technology-based education with hands-on learning experiences. He envisions schools to be equipped with libraries, laboratories, conference hall and various other equipment in it, creating an environment where students can engage with cutting-edge technologies while developing practical skills. This integration of technology with practical learning represents a significant change from traditional rote learning that solely relied on textbooks and lectures. Such technology-based practical learning is essential for students to thrive in a fast-paced global economy. Emphasizing on the potential learning opportunities to rural areas that have traditionally been limited to theoretical instruction due to resource constraints.

Kalam critiques on the evaluation pattern, that measures success only through standardized examination testing. Such assessments only reinforce rote learning by rewarding memorization rather than understanding, creativity, or practical application of the concepts and theories. This transition from rote learning to creative and practical education is essential in understanding of the world and its actions. That influences teaching practices and students learning behaviors, valuing creativity, critical thinking, and practical application, in contemporary contexts.

Role of Teachers as Mentors Not Just Instructors: Dr. Kalam's vision of education is that, it should be guided by teachers that acts as the central required for learning and changes to occur, elevating their role beyond mere instruction. He describes teachers as "the real assets of the country" who possess the power to make students able to actively participate in the contribution of forming an enhanced nation. Reframes the whole teaching profession, positioning teachers not as mere transmitters of information but as the guiding light in the mist of uncertainty and doubt. Kalam draws this analogy, "What soil is to earth teachers are to the society," emphasizing the importance of fertile soil which provides the essential foundation for plants to grow, similarly teachers are responsible to create the same nurturing environment in which young minds can develop and flourish. This metaphor illuminates Kalam's understanding of teaching as a foundational element of social progress. Throughout the book, he stresses that the influence of teachers that shapes the creative lives, which extends beyond the academic instruction to determine the character, values, and aspirations of future generations.

Kalam gives credit of his own success largely to the teachers under whom he had received such great mentorship, illustrating the life-changing impact of teachers in one's life

who transcended their instructional roles to provide guidance, inspiration, and moral support to the growing individuals bringing about a different set of practicality and possibility. He recalls one teacher's words that remained with him throughout his life which was, "As plants are shaped by cultivation, men are shaped by education". According to Kalam, a dedicated teacher is like a candle, which burns itself but gives light to others, highlighting the element of self-sacrifice which is inherent in the genuine mentorship of our second parents i.e., teachers. Teaching is an act of generosity which cannot be achieved by each and every individual purely based on a deeper level of commitment to student in their process or initial stages of development.

Kalam outlines specific qualities that the teachers possess as an effective mentor rather than mere instructors. He states the primary factor that a teacher must have is that, they should love what they do which simply means that they should love teaching demonstrating their passion for sharing knowledge, should encourage questions from students that fosters critical thinking and intellectual curiosity, put the student ahead by prioritizing student needs and development over personal benefits and growth, and fostering students to explore their own capabilities and new possibilities, challenging students to discover one's true potential. These characteristics are crucial for a teacher to be a good facilitator of student-centered learning and development. This mentorship approach is the product of both academic learning of students in the controlled environment while also recognizing the crucial role of teachers in helping students navigate their future or journey by discovering their unique potential.

Instead of following a set of rules, teachers as the mentors should emphasize the important and value that education upholds which also encourages creativity and authenticity. He argues that teachers should not restrict students from exploring certain new patterns, even when these ideas challenge the established knowledge. As the mentors, teachers should create a safe space for students to develop their own perspectives rather than simply following the guidelines of those of the teacher's. This aspect of mentorship is crucial for cultivating the "true leaders" that Kalam envisions which are essential for national progress of India. Individuals are capable of coming up with their own unique, original thoughts and ideas showcasing the attributes of leadership rather than merely competent followers of established patterns.

Additionally, Kalam emphasizes the ethical and moral aspects of mentoring. He believes that teachers have so many responsibilities that includes not only in developing students' knowledge and skills but also to instill ethical and moral values that will guide their application of these capabilities through their behavior and actions of the future. According to Kalam, teachers are the moral guides who help students in creating ethical and moral frameworks to make meaningful contributions to our country's society. Unlike instruction, which can be morally neutral and is just the transmission of information, mentorship engages with questions, values, and social responsibility, helping students in their development not only in terms of competence but also in their character and conscience.

Case Studies of Indian Schools: In order to achieve life-changing education in India, Dr. Kalam's book highlights the vision of numerous schools and colleges to implement technology and practical-based learning in their reforms. An example is displayed through the case study of a movement carried out, Mahatma Gandhi Global Indian Eklavya School (MGGIES) in Tilakwada, a tribal area around Baroda in Gujarat. This initiative was established in 2008 between the Global Schools Foundation and the Government of Gujarat; this institution specifically focuses on providing quality education to the children in tribal areas who have limited access to learning resources as we trace the patterns of their history. After seven years of operation under the Global Schools Foundation, the school emerged as a role model for tribal schools in the country, achieving remarkable outcomes 10th and 12th board examinations. Beyond academic success, MGGIES has excelled in other extracurricular activities which was introduced to them in their respective institutions, with students later becoming national champions and to give light, recognition and acknowledgement to their schools and colleges. This case demonstrates how Kalam's vision of education has been successfully implemented in unreserved communities, changing the educational opportunities provided to them.

In another study, Kalam references the efforts of the Global Indian Foundation in Singapore, which created various learning programs inspired by his philosophy and teachings. In 2008, Dr. Kalam opened a campus in Balestier while he was still in Singapore. These campuses implemented the learning approaches such as the "Happiness Index," based on Kalam's assertion that "the primary objective of life is to be happy" and that "happiness is the key component in the upbringing of all children." This significant focus on student well-being alongside their academic achievement reflects Kalam's teaching approach to education, stating that, in order to achieve effective learning, one must be in the learning and positive environments that considers the factors such as emotional, psychological and intellectual needs of an individual to achieve greater heights. In accordance with Dr. Kalam's learning objectives and outcomes, the foundation also approved Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam scholarships in 2006, to allowing students to effectively study at GIIS schools, expanding the horizon of knowledge and providing access to high quality education for talented students regardless of one facing financial or emotional issues, that aligns with Dr. Kalam's learning objectives and outcomes.

The book also examines learning initiatives that was carried out by the Global Indian Foundation in collaboration with SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Association) for Singaporean students. These programs focused on developing a customized and personalized curriculum for underperforming students, demonstrating how Kalam's addressed the needs of diverse students and the techniques to aid their psychological integrity and focus on self-improvement. The students' learning development was greatly impacted by the foundation's "\$1 million to SINDA" donation for curriculum development. Additionally, the introduction of "free yoga programs for Singaporeans" reflects Kalam's holistic learning philosophy is deeply rooted in cultural aspect of his nation that encompasses physical well-being and cultural development alongside academic learning. These case studies mentioned above demonstrates how Kalam's learning vision transcends national boundaries, making his work a part of the world literature inspiring the lives of the educators and youth through his life-changing learning

practices and sensitivity to local needs and cultural contexts.

In addition, Kalam also presents his vision for schools in India at 2020 as ‘symbiotic nerve centers’ that connects teachers, students and community altogether and that each one of the components are required and are important for the growth of all and hence the nation. The implementation of various new plans for learning have been done lately across various places, institutions, and programs that provides a greater significance to the educational reforms that shapes the mind of the beings. He stresses that schools and colleges must change in the instructional pattern followed by them for the people of it to gain real-world skills. There are certain factors that are generally being overlooked upon that should be kept in mind to improve the knowledge gaining practice and encourage the learners to be more attentive and thrive for more in their respected fields. Some factors are, good building with ventilation and lighting, spacious classrooms, a library, laboratories, latest equipment and tools, safe drinking water, clean toilets and a playground. Making the learning fun and exciting and not left alone feeling forced by the concept that need to be memorized at any cost to do better in academics.

Kalam addresses the importance for information and communication technology that will help the rural areas and its communities to transform in the learning approaches and be not bound to any limitations that hinders or concerns with the intellectual properties, creating young leaders and innovative minds. That also involves improved integrity in technology-based learning that helps one grow and perform better in every way possible. These above stated case studies demonstrate the life-changing power of technology and its influence on education and its learning process. Kalam also gives his take on technology to be used in favor of learning and not be something to waste time upon, as something which has its pros must have some cons. Balanced the implied approaches of learning leading to innovation and technological advancement while also appreciating the role of teachers, mentors, and community in the learning process.

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