UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.

शिक्षा वह है जो विद्यालय में
सीखी गई बातों को भूल जाने के

बाद भी शेष रह जाती है।

EXAM YEAR

2023

PAPER

Essay

SUBJECT

Essay

MARKS

125

WORD LIMIT

~1200 words

Answer Hint

Education is deeper than memorisation and examination performance. It leaves behind ways of thinking, values, curiosity, judgment, empathy, discipline and the capacity to learn continuously. Examine the distinction between schooling and education, the role of teachers and institutions, the importance of experiential learning and the need to align education with citizenship, character and lifelong learning.

Model Answer

Introduction

Schooling provides structured exposure to knowledge, concepts and skills, while education is a lifelong process that transforms the way an individual thinks, behaves and engages with society. The statement suggests that the true outcome of education is not the information retained for an examination but the intellectual and ethical capabilities that remain when specific facts are forgotten.

Schooling and education are not identical

www.becomeias.com YouTube: becomIAS | Instagram: howtobecomeias

Schooling generally operates within a curriculum. Students learn mathematics, history, science, languages and other subjects and are assessed through examinations.

Education, however, goes beyond curriculum. It develops curiosity, reasoning, creativity, empathy, discipline and the ability to distinguish right from wrong.

A student may forget a particular formula years after leaving school but retain the ability to approach a problem logically. Such a capability represents education in its deeper sense.

Education as the development of thinking

The most important educational outcome is the capacity to think independently. Education should encourage students to ask questions rather than merely reproduce answers.

Scientific education, for example, should cultivate curiosity and evidence-based reasoning. Social science should encourage students to understand different perspectives. Literature can develop empathy by allowing individuals to experience lives different from their own.

Thus, education expands both intellectual capacity and emotional understanding.

Education and character

Education also contributes to character formation. Values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, tolerance and respect for others cannot be reduced to textbook definitions.

A student who learns about environmental protection but develops the habit of conserving resources has internalised education. Similarly, learning about constitutional values becomes meaningful when it translates into respect for equality, liberty and dignity.

Education therefore connects knowledge with conduct.

The role of teachers

Teachers are not merely transmitters of information. Their deeper role is to cultivate curiosity, confidence and intellectual discipline.

A good teacher can inspire students to explore beyond textbooks, question assumptions and learn from failure. The influence of a teacher may remain decades after the specific lessons taught in the classroom have been forgotten.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

This is why education is ultimately a human relationship as much as an institutional process.

Education and democracy

Democracy requires citizens who can evaluate information, understand competing viewpoints and participate responsibly in public life.

In an age of misinformation and social-media manipulation, rote knowledge alone is insufficient. Citizens need media literacy, critical thinking and the ability to distinguish evidence from propaganda.

Education therefore becomes essential for the survival of informed democratic discourse.

Education in the digital age

Technology has transformed access to information. Today, a student can access enormous quantities of knowledge through the internet. Consequently, the value of education increasingly lies in knowing how to evaluate, interpret and apply information.

Artificial intelligence may provide answers, but educated individuals must determine whether those answers are accurate, ethical and appropriate to the context.

Thus, education must shift from information accumulation towards learning how to learn.

Experiential learning

Experiences often leave deeper educational impressions than memorisation. Participating in community service can teach empathy more effectively than merely reading about social responsibility. Conducting a scientific experiment can develop understanding more effectively than memorising a definition.

Sports can teach teamwork, resilience and discipline. Art can develop imagination and sensitivity.

Education therefore flourishes when learners actively engage with the world.

Education as lifelong learning

The modern world changes rapidly. Technologies, professions and social conditions evolve continuously. Therefore, education cannot end with graduation.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP

The capacity to learn, unlearn and relearn is increasingly important. A person who retains curiosity and adaptability remains capable of responding to new circumstances even when earlier knowledge becomes obsolete.

This is the deepest meaning of the statement: education leaves behind the ability to continue educating oneself.

Challenges in the Indian education system

India has made significant progress in expanding access to education, but challenges remain in learning outcomes, rote learning, unequal digital access, teacher capacity and examination-oriented culture.

The National Education Policy 2020 seeks to promote holistic, multidisciplinary and competency-based learning. Its emphasis on critical thinking, flexibility, vocational exposure and experiential learning reflects the need to move beyond rote memorisation.

The challenge is to ensure that these principles translate effectively into classroom practice.

Conclusion

The true test of education is not how many facts a person can remember but how the person thinks, behaves and continues to learn after leaving the classroom. Knowledge may fade, but curiosity, reasoning, character, empathy and the ability to learn can remain lifelong. Therefore, the purpose of education should be to create not merely successful examination candidates, but thoughtful human beings and responsible citizens capable of continuously learning from the world around them.

BECOME IAS
AI POWERED UPSC PREP