
‘Education should only be concerned with what is useful in life.’ Discuss.

Tracing back to the industrial revolution, the rapid building of infrastructure to train factory workers has bestowed the concepts of “schools” or “formal education”. At that time, education was primarily a mechanism to churn out efficient workers of the economy and pinned to the utilitarian perception of education who argue that education should be concerned with what one can directly gain. As a result, we are grained with an idea that education should be about what is considered useful or functional. Yet ever since, the evolution of education with the sands of time has modernised the system and expanded its aims to educate students about intangible aspects such as values, meaning and leisure. We start to ponder that it involves more than what we need for gains and should be more inclusive. In view of such polarising perspectives, this essay argues that education should not be concerned with what is useful in life.

Education should be concerned with what is useful in life as the main purpose of education is to ensure that individuals can gain employment and have a decent standard of living. In education today, parents invest much more money so that their children can get good grades. The aim of education is considered useful and purposeful if we are able to gain economically as an individual to live more comfortably in the modernised and capitalistic world. Consequently, their child would get greater work opportunities and higher starting pay if they are well educated. For example, Singapore has a billion dollar tuition industry where parents send their children for extra enrichment classes. The qualifications they get set them for good jobs. In the civil service the salary scale is based upon qualification attained in schools so better grades guarantees a higher salary. Therefore, education should be concerned with what we can gain from education which is a good job with the resources like time and money put into the cause of education.

However, the above view is myopic and does not consider the holistic purpose of education. Education is more than just being a productive member of the economy but also the development of one’s moral orientation and perspective towards life which are important aspects of life. In the long term, education should allow youths to gain subtle and indirect benefits from life. Simply, education should equip youths with the necessary tools and means to deal with the uncertainty of life by providing solid foundation and values orientation.

With hindsight assessment, education should not be concerned with what is useful but focus on expanding our social circle which may not be directly useful but psychologically significant in helping out our life in the future. In education, the institutional system allows individuals to forge friendships via designated or voluntary means. The placement of an individual in a particular class or Co-curricular activities (CCA) group allows them to expand their friendship circle and foster bonds with others. In the long term, such friendships forged in school would provide pivotal to guide and support individuals in the rough and tumble of life and society. Without such important psychological support, individuals from broken families have no means of support and would crumble emotionally. For example, a 2019 study published in the journal PLOS ONE, found that the strength of a person's social circle was a better predictor of well-being levels. As such, education in terms of friendship and social support may not allow individuals to extract direct benefits but are crucial cogs to ensure one is a healthy and functioning member of society.

Furthermore, what is considered not useful in life may be ignored as the impact of this form of education is subtle and perpetual such as the formation of our character in terms of morality and values. The pitfall of deriving only the direct benefits of education may allow one to overlook crucial moral foundations laid out in education that serves as a moral compass which guides an individual to effectively maneuver the complex maze of society. More so than ever, education provides the basis of moral values for individuals to deal with moral dilemmas today. For example, school programmes that teach students to observe and regulate either emotions allow them to better manage them. In the future, this would be important as they might face emotional setbacks when dealing with others.

More importantly, education should not be concerned with what is useful as it is an enriching process through education to raise our spirits with passion and devotion to causes in life that will make our lives more purposeful and meaningful. Simply put, education should fundamentally strive to reignite or ignite the burning passion and calling within every individual. Education should provide diverse avenues and platforms for individuals to learn skills and hone them. In the process, they should be able to discover their strengths and weaknesses, interests and dislikes. This helps in shaping their vision and direction for their future in society and crucially how they ought to live life. That should be the nobleness of education, though not directly or tangentially

beneficial but a crucial determinant of an individual's life in the near future. For example, schools programmes that offer career guidance and interest programmes allow students to discover their inner passions. Thereby, education should not only be concerned with what is useful but consider the enriching process of uncovering the passion and purpose of living in a student.

In view of the role education will play in our life journey, we cannot deny that it is of great imperative and we must have a serious view about what we think of education. What we learn will determine who we are. It is important for us to learn as much as possible. We need to learn things which seem to be useful and functional but also need to learn things which we cannot identify the benefits of so directly and easily. This will make our learning more complete, enrich and complete our life.