

Education does not
develop individuality
but conformity



Education, the act of imparting the knowledge, skills, and habits into a group of people, is close to our hearts at the earlier stages in life. It is a crucial part in our lives, not to be taken lightly, and of course, plays a major role in deciding what we become. The concept of an education system came with the aim of equipping students with the necessary skills to fill the jobs in society to make the country more productive. Education systems vary greatly in style and administration in different countries.

Some countries advocate liberal education, whereas others advocate functionalist education. Therefore, to say that Education develops either individuality or conformity is silly since it does not specify which education system it is referring to. This statement stands for functionalist education systems like that of Singapore's. In the past, our society has been modelled such a way that uniqueness and individuality is greatly frowned upon. Everyone wanted to be a part of the larger group and no one wanted to be "different from the rest", or the "odd one out".

However, as we progress, we realize that somehow individuality is important as well, as everyone is different from everyone, and more emphasis is being placed on individuality. But the question is, has the education system managed to keep up with the changes? The answer is an obvious no. Singapore's education system is one that is highly instrumental, regimented, competitive and highly performance-orientated. Because of the meritocratic nature of Singapore's society, education has become less about developing individuals and more about achievements and grades, which inevitably compels people to avert from "the less taken route".

Though this is true for most of the Asian countries, the statement does not stand for the British liberal education. In Britain, education encourages the open discussion of topics throughout all levels of education. It is based on the medieval concept of the liberal arts, which has been described as “ a philosophy of education that empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a stronger sense of values, ethics, and civic engagement characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific course or field of study.”.

This system is flexible with school schedules and timetables, has no fixed syllabus to be taught, and students are allowed to study whatever subject they choose. Also, there are minimal restrictions in trivial matters such as hair length, attire and appearance since it is deemed as irrelevant in determining the quality of grades. All the above measure help to form a conducive environment for nurturing the creativity in a students, which requires ample room for individual experimentation.

Though some may say that education systems such as Singapore’s are under-going change, but the “ change” that has been happening for years has not managed to change anything. Students of the education system are still forced to comply with a set of rules and regulations, forced to wear the same thing as what some few thousand other students are wearing, forced to believe in the same values, and the list goes on. The idea of rules is central to all forms of education – people need rules to teach them the limits of what they can and cannot do.

However, as are most things in society, rules are double-edged swords. While it protects people from others, it also limits the areas of interest because people avert from testing boundaries, making them conform to what the government or society deems as “ safe”. Ultimately, while some education systems develops individuality, there are also some out there which do not. Education cannot be generalized and compared just like that as it is unjust and unfair to do so.