

EVALUATION INDICATORS

1. Contextual Competence
2. Content Competence
3. Language Competence
4. Introduction Competence
5. Structure - Presentation Competence
6. Conclusion Competence

Overall Macro Comments / feedback / suggestions on Answer Booklet:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

All the Best

* Has the emphasis on ed tech changed education from necessity to privilege?

Edtech, in simple terms, can be defined as the technological dissemination of education to the people at large. This can be either through smartphones, laptop-computers or even through satellite TV. In present times however the former two mediums have been the main source of it, with internet playing a pivotal role in it.

Although, governments had started focusing on the technology since the 1980s with Indian government coming up with its SITE initiative and also later initiatives such as Vigyan Prasar's InduSeva in this direction; in recent years the sector has seen revolutionary progress.

Today, education has increasingly shifted to technological mediums.

Although the rapid growth in the sector started with the so called 'Tier Revolution' in India which dramatically brought down internet tariffs, its real development came with the Covid 19 outbreak.

Covid 19 saw governments imposing all pervasive and unprecedented lockdowns of their respective populations. These lockdowns pushed educational institutions to discontinue their offline modus operandi and go online. Hence even mainstream education shifted to technological mediums.

The sheer progress that the sector has seen in past few years can be gauged by the fact that edutech startups like Unacademy and Byjus have within 5-6 years of their existence have crossed the \$1 billion valuation mark.

All the mainstream coaching

U.P.S.C.

प्रश्न संख्या
(Question No.)

इस भाग में कुछ
न लिखें
(Don't write anything
in this part)

institutions for almost every competitive exam from UPSC to JEE, have too now gone online with now even tests being available in a hybrid offline plus online mode.

A whole industry of educational channels have emerged on Youtube with some like Wifistudy almost having a whooping 10 million subscribers.

Government too has jumped on the bandwagon with its initiatives such as SWAYAM, SWAYAM-Peetha, development of Massive open online courses (MOOCs), Diksha portal etc.

Hence a rapidly growing edtech revolution is underway in India with even after the subsiding of the pandemic the new tech-oriented mode of learning remaining all pervasive and booming.

Although, a positive development at

its core, it has also brought some negative consequences with many commentators and experts warning that it may turn the noble activity of education from a necessity to privilege.

Let us first see what positive consequences the edtech revolution has brought with itself.

First of all the edtech revolution has greatly increased the accessibility of quality educational content. It has broken the virtual monopoly of elite institutions and cities over it. Today one doesn't need to be at a certain place or in a certain institution to clear a competitive exam as some content now is just a surfacing on the internet.

The inspiring example of a coolie clearing the UPSC-CSE exam while continuing to work at his job, just

by listening to online lessons is a case in point. Two decades back this might not have been possible without him enrolling in an elite coaching institution in Delhi.

Edtel has also made education much more personalised. Today one can attend a lecture at even at midnight as most lectures are pre-recorded now. This has also come as a great help to working professionals or to even those children who due to some reasons can't attend schools.

More innovative methods of learning, easier and near universal dissemination of learning and easy availability of education all have been the other benefits associated with the edtech revolution.

This can be seen in the fact that a single educational video which is just a surf away on Youtube

generates millions of views and students, a content which if disseminated in a classroom would have at best reached not more than a hundred people.

Hence on its positive side edtech revolution has led to increased democratisation of educational content and access.

However, the picture hasn't been all so positive as many negative consequences too have accompanied it.

The increasingly online oriented mode of education has created a new type of inequality, the digital inequality. This is due to the fact that digital access and digital literacy are still a huge problem in India.

A report by the NSSO states that only 15% rural and 32% urban households had access to computers.

U.P.S.C.

प्रश्न संख्या
(Question No.)

इस भाग में कुछ
न लिखें
(Don't write anything
in this part)

Internet access similarly stood ~~at~~ at 30% and 50% respectively. Internal dynamics within these states were also moving, ~~with~~ with men having substantially more access than women and rich states having more than poor ones.

For ~~is~~ instance the least digital divide was there in Delhi-NCR and Kerala which too stood at around 50% access, implying almost half of their population ~~at~~ didn't had access to digital technologies.

This hence has effectively meant that a huge number of students now stand excluded from accessing quality education due to their inability to access it digitally.

The seriousness of the problem can be gauged by the fact that Indian government was worried that due to online only education during

Covid 19, gains made on the child labour prediction were to be backtracked.

This was due to the RTE Act induced physical retention of pupils in schools. disappearing in wake of physical closure of schools.

While at school level the problem is getting addressed as more and more states now are resuming physical classes, a problem which might remain is that of issues associated with edtech startups.

Edtech startups which started as largely free services, which many continue to remain still, they have now increasingly moved towards commercialisation.

Although monetisation of services is not a negative development, the way it is being done is worrying. Unprecedented for instance although started as a largely free service now

charges exorbitant fees for its courses comparable to what offline institutions charge. Many a times false advertisements, old courses being sold as new etc. too have been seen.

Further most such startups have now taken to hidden costs which hinders the very benefit of edtech i.e. Accessibility.

All these problems have been further compounded by the largely unregulated nature of the edtech space and their incongruence with the legal and constitutional requirements which apply to their offline counterparts such as Right to Education Act and reservation policies respectively.

Also the burden of going online, or even hybrid has sounded the death knell for a huge number of private institutions as many lack the required resources to do so, a problem also associated with the socio-

economic profile of students in them.

Hence, in this way, while on one hand the edtech revolution has demonetised the educational space on the other it has turned the necessary service of education into a largely privileged commodity.

Hence, it is now required on the part of the government that it addresses the anomalies that have emerged through first bridging the digital divide and then by devising a comprehensive and facilitative regulatory regime for the edtech sector. As lack of such initiatives may soon lead to exacerbation of the problem of 'digital poverty' and turning the boon that edtech is into a bane.

* Asian Century: a new world order?

The term Asian century has been used by political and international relations experts to define the 21st century marked by an Asian, primarily Indo-Chinese, dominated world order. It originated in the beardrop of the momentous economic rise of these countries post the 1980s along with that of the Asian Tiger economies of the south-east Asian region.

The recent political rise of India and China and especially China which now eyes a global power status much like the USA, in the political domain too has shown signs of a century dominated by Asian powers.

While ~~for~~ the initial two decades of the 21st century have shown glimpses of this to be the case, a plethora of features have also shown a picture just opposite of

it. To understand what's the potential of this prospect, what hinders its achievement and what a such an order would look like or what it ought to look like, we must deal with these aspects separately.

First let's understand why it can be the Asian century or what's the potential of this prospect.

In the political domain the region is marked by two major powers, India and China, both of who are the superpower states.

Middle powers such as the gulf countries economies of West Asia and South-east Asian countries are along with the countries of South Asia too exist.

A politico - economic powerhouse like Japan also is a part of it apart from a substantial Russian presence.

Hence politically the continent

checks all the markers required for such a dominant role.

Economically too the region houses four of the ten biggest economies such as China, India, Japan and the ASEAN bloc and also a ^{rich} ~~booming~~ natural resource base. Oil, coal, iron ore etc. are all available in abundance. Both West and South East Asia are regions of prosperity and the leggers of South Asia too are growing heavily at double digit figures.

Regional multilateral cooperation in form of ASEAN, GCC and the recent RCEP all point towards a dominant economic future for the region. This combined with huge fisheries and natural resource potential that Indian Ocean and lies in it like South China & sea possess.

Geo-strategically too the continent acquires an important role with it home to countries with huge coastlines, several maritime powers, one of the

most crucial choke points such as Straits of Hoernum and Melacca etc.

West Asian oil resources, Central Asian natural resources, an expansionist China, a rising India and an increasing Western interest and presence in the region signified by the Indo-Pacific concept and QUAD; all have meant that strategically the region remains important.

Other factors going in its favour include the facts that it is the second largest continent, demographically it is the most populous continent with the second youngest population and culturally the region is vibrant, diverse and one which shares deep civilizational ties.

Hence all counts the Asian continent led by India and China reflects the potential to dominate and lead the

21st century world order.

However, many factors have also shown the inability of the continent to do so as they have effectively hindered such realisation.

The conflict ridden nature of the continent is the first and foremost reason. Biennial conflicts in West Asia such as the recent ones in Syria and Yemen are a case in point.

Further the Israel-Palestine rivalry, Saudi-Iran differences, Indo-Pak rivalry and the most recent India-China differences have meant that the continent is always sitting on brink of conflicts having potential to become full-blown disasters.

Political uncertainties and instability also add to the problem as most South-east and West Asian countries have weak democratic policies which can anytime slip into dictatorships.

Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia are very recent examples of this.

Multi-ethnic and often conflict ridden societies, the perennial instability in Afghanistan, the Chinese dictatorship and its expansionism etc. all have meant that politically the region has remained fragmented.

This is compounded by the problems such as terrorism, drug trade, piracy etc. all of which threaten peace in the region. This is due to the fact that the continent hosts many of the biggest terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda and two of the biggest drug trade hubs - the golden crescent and golden triangle. Piracy too is a serious problem in Indian Ocean.

Economically too, the region continent suffers on many accounts. West Asian oil boom seems to be ending, South

Asia is one of the poorest and least economically integrated regions in the world, RCEP has seen India withdrawing from it, further the inter-regional cooperation between these areas remains next to none.

Taliban has returned to power in Afghanistan, terrorism still is a problem and with security globalisation South-east Asian to economy to economies will see their fortunes being hurt.

Hence in totality these factors hinder prospects of any sign of an Asian led world order on the contrary they promote its politico-
economic domination by the more organised and prosperous West!

While this discussion establishes the potential of and difficulties that hinder an Asian century we must now look at what is required on

part of the countries in the continent to utilize their latent potential to create an Asian Century and also what principles.

Politically, the middle powers must take a lead to first address the dislikes between nations in the continent and also the existing conflicts. Economic leavages and also propende of international forums must both be used. India must take a lead in this regard especially vis-à-vis the South Asian region.

Cooperation with like minded countries must be sought within the continent and also with West to address thumping issues like Chinese expansionism, climate change, terrorism, drug trade, piracy etc. What the continent. India is very well positioned for ~~these~~^{this} and hence must take a lead.

Inter-regional FTAs, multi lateral trade blocs, reg a regional WTO like organisation etc. must characterise policies in the economic domain. India must take up the cause of South Asian economic integration through SAARC.

Diversification of economic activities must guide West Asian oil economies, integration and cooperation must do the same for South Asia and greater regionalisation and diversification of supply chains for East and South East Asia.

Countries like India with their demographic dividend opportunities must cooperate with other countries with same opportunity to cash it in and bring shared prosperity for the continent as a whole.

Institutions ~~at~~ like QUAD and strategies like Indo-Pacific must be

strengthened to let not a single nation disturb the peace in the region.

All these strategies must have at their core democratic principles of equality, liberty, freedom, equitable growth, safety, security and peace at their core. Asian spiritualism and rich cultural values must also guide them.

Hence while a roused prospect the idea of an Asian Century has huge potential, potential which can be realised through right strategies of cooperation and coordination guided by democratic and civilisational values.