

EDITORIAL

School as a Crime Scene: Normlessness and Obsolescence in School

Today's schools are experiencing a previously unheard-of sense of powerlessness and normlessness. Reflecting on history, from the late Middle Ages to the early 18th century, the primary objective of education was to make children more literate, disciplined, thoughtful, and religious. Alarmingly, morals and values are not incorporated into the school curriculum or present in school activities in our 21st-century schools. Right before our eyes, anomie finds its way into school operations, and violence carries over into the classroom. Sexual violence and bullying have become practices that students anticipate in the classrooms. Student safety is becoming a leading challenge confronting schools, not to mention the unresolved issues of inequalities, discrimination, and lack of exposure to inclusivity, leaving the expectations of parents and society unquenched.

In the last century, we were told that schools are mini societies that unite students from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and races. They would serve as a sanctuary that fosters knowledge and culture and prepares students for civil engagement. One prescient question must be answered to determine if this belief still holds. What are the priorities of today's schools?

In this modern era, some schools prioritise only academic outcomes, viewing them as the sole measure of school effectiveness, and administrators and policy-makers fail to recognise the importance of developing humanity in their students. Students have become targets instead of peers. They are increasingly dropping out of school due to individual or small group threats, turning schools into battlefields where students often arm themselves for self-protection and defence.

At the helm of every successful academic organisation are good leaders and teachers. Yet, teacher professional development enhancement for the betterment of teaching and learning in these challenging times is woefully inadequate for many schools, with economic constraints, limited funds and resources, as well as insufficient professional training. The 21st century has brought us advanced technology and instructional tools, but it is essential for school administrators and educators to receive training on how to effectively integrate these tools in the educational process.

A school system becomes obsolete as it struggles to raise funds for survival and "runs helter-skelter" to stay afloat. Today's school systems are no longer meeting the needs of the students, teachers, or society. Often, a school maintains an outdated curriculum, which, when revamped or modernized, increases the workload for students and teachers. As a result, excessive workloads and overwhelming assignments drive students into a state of mental fragility. Teachers barely sleep at night or have enough time to prepare their lessons – succumbing to burnout and pushed to the brink. Assessments no longer evaluate the intended learning outcomes.

Overuse of artificial intelligence (AI) has reduced students' creativity, making them overdependent on applications like ChatGPT to the point of being unable to think for themselves. Without encouraging students to think critically and creatively, schools have devolved into test factories. Students are desperate to get high grades and equate self-worth with academic grades and performances.

Today's education and schools' preference of STEM over the social sciences and humanities signifies intellectual decline, not progress—where empathy is superseded by technological efficiency, ethics are eclipsed by innovation, and there is a separation between education and humanity. Affirming learning as a core business of educational institutions and learners as the most prioritised stakeholders, schools should strive to navigate these contemporary challenges and make schools better again, safeguarding students' physical well-being, mental health, and intellectual growth. These must be priorities for educational institutions and leaders. Administrators should revisit the fundamental values of education, A school that does not prioritise these values is like a body without a soul.

I leave you with this “bitter truth” editorial to digest while you are reading the articles in the IIUM IJES for the January 2026 issue.

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