

**OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION: UNPACKING IVAN ILLICH'S IDEAS****Mr. Habibullah Shah***Assistant Professor (Education), Directorate of Distance Education,  
University of Kashmir Srinagar***ABSTRACT**

*Ivan Illich is one of the most critical and extensive educational theorists of the last half-century. Illich has reflected on many social issues including education. Education was very close to Illich's heart. He also himself being an unmatched teacher, has discussed critically at many places in his writings the objectives of education. Education should aim at deschooling society as deschooling is the tangible social change that can create in human the consciousness of his potential and worth. In this paper, an attempt has been made to map out the objectives of education in Illich's educational philosophy.*

**Keywords:** *Deschooling, Freedom, Liberation and Radical changes*

**Introduction**

Iván Illich (1926-2002) is one of the most critical and extensive educational theorists of the last half-century (Jandrić, 2014; Marja Saurén, & Määttä, 2011). Illich was well-known amongst all intellectual circles of his time. Harvard academic Harvey Cox (2002), who knew and studied with Illich in the 1970s, called him “a prophet, a teacher and a realistic dreamer” (p.16). Likewise, Thomas Quigley (2002) said, “Ivan Illich was one of the most celebrated, denounced, praised and defamed figures of mid-20th century American Catholicism—a gadfly, a charmer, a ruthless critic, and a truly original, if highly unorthodox, figure.” As a critical writer and thinker, Ivan Illich has reflected almost on every social institution of life in his publications including education. In the area of education, Illich's thoughts are being regurgitated from different perspectives linked to the theory of education in the academic context (Shah, 2015). Illich revealed his radical ideas in his book *Deschooling Society* is also reflection of critical educational ideas. In this paper, an attempt has been made to flag out the objectives of education in Illich's educational theory. The methodological approach is qualitative with hermeneutics in focus. Therefore, this paper is conceptual in nature and is grounded in Illich's educational theory of deschooling.

Ivan Illich's ageless contribution is a dissection of educational system as he paid much attention towards educational system of industrialized world. Illich believed that the contemporary crisis of education demands that we review the very idea of publicly prescribed learning, rather than the methods used in its enforcement. This is only possible when we review the concept and objectives of education. Illich's concept of education is absolutely radical and he believed that our educational institutions have become “academic cafeterias” where degrees not education are sold at handsome cost. He advocated that education for all means education by all (Illich, 1971). He believed that most learning is result of social interaction as he said:

*“Everyone learns how to live outside school. We learn to speak, to think, to love, to feel, to play, to curse, to politick, and to work without interference from a teacher. Even children who are under a teacher's care day and night are no exception to the rule” (Illich, 19971; 2).*

## Aims and Objectives of Education

Ivan Illich was a reconstructionist as well as an existentialist philosopher, therefore his aims and objectives of education epitomize the educational goals of reconstructionism and existentialism schools of philosophy. He believed that society is in need of constant reconstruction or change which he termed as *deschooling* and such a social change involves both reconstruction of education and the use of that education in reconstructing society. In other words, he advocated that education should aim at deschooling society as he said. *“Everywhere not only education but society as a whole needs deschooling”* (Illich, 19971: 2).

Education should aim at deschooling society as deschooling is the tangible social change that can create in human the consciousness of his potential and worth. Illich advocated that education should like to involve people more a change-agents, to change both themselves and the world around them. Global community, universal brotherhood, humanity, freedom of learning and teaching are the different ideals that Ivan Illich believe in and desire to implement in educational setup. Ivan Illich while discussing the purposes of education said:

*‘A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Such a system would require the application of constitutional guarantees to education’* (Illich, 19971; 54).

Illich advocated that education should deal with the individual as a unique being in the world, not only as a creator of ideas, but as a living and feeling being. He argues that education should promote a sense of involvement in life through actions (Shah, 2015). Illich further contends that the goal of education should be to promote human freedom and dignity. Freedom is the watchword in Illich’s aims of education, which stands for complete, undiluted and absolute freedom but it does not mean that man should deviate from the natural laws. Freedom involves choice. It is not possible not to choose. If we do not choose, it means that we are not able to free. As Illich puts it, we *“should give each one of us an environment in which we can celebrate our potential-and discover the way into a more humane world”* (Illich, 19971; 15). Illich in his own words:

*“...I personally believe that freedom from undue hurt to a man’s reputation through labeling is better guaranteed by restricting than by forbidding tests of competence”.* (Illich, 19971; 55)

Education should help man to make him human, make him willing once again to stand alone, willing to withstand the pressure of institutionalization in order to reconstruct the society (Illich, 1971). He believed that education must aim at developing the integrity in the students which is necessary in the task of not only making individual choices, but also feeling responsible, for those choices. Man must have the realization that there is no happiness without pain, no ecstasy, without suffering (Illich, 1973). Illich advocated that education should promote and develop integrity among people. Integrity refers to a life that is whole and of strong moral principle. In this way, Illich stressed that aim of education should be moral as well as spiritual development. He also pleaded that education should promote friendship as friendship is

necessary for learning and survival of society. Illich coined the term deschooling which is an umbrella term and is the reflection of his educational philosophy particularly his ideas on objectives of education are hidden in this term. He backed strictly that education should promote and work for deschooling which could mean the advent of a brave new world dominated by well-intentioned administrators of programmed instruction. Listen to Illich, he said;

*“Inevitably the deschooling of society will blur the distinctions between economics, education, and politics on which the stability of the present world order and the stability of nations now rest” (Illich, 1971; 73).*

Ivan Illich argues that education should cultivate the radical, innovative, and technological attitude among students. He desires the liberation for humans through education. Illich states:

1. *“To liberate access to things by abolishing the control which persons and institutions now exercise over their educational values.*
2. *To liberate the sharing of skills by guaranteeing freedom to teach or exercise them on request.*
3. *To liberate the critical and creative resources of people by returning to individual persons the ability to call and hold meetings an ability now increasingly monopolized by institutions which claim to speak for the people.*
4. *To liberate the individual from the obligation to shape his expectations to the services offered by any established profession by providing him with the opportunity to draw on the experience of his peers and to entrust himself to the teacher, guide, adviser, or healer of his choice” (Illich, 19971; 72-73).*

Illich claims that it is a genuinely human need to understand the world in which we live in order to make decisions about how to live in that world by the process of education (Illich, 1972). He further advocates that aims and objectives of education should be to help everyone to be involved in some way in social action and people should strive for unity rather than fragmentation. He argued that education should promote and preserve vernacular values and vernacular culture as vernacular culture reflects reality through local experience and supports the power of sustainable living. Illich in his own words said:

*Vernacular is a Latin term that we use in English only for the language that we have acquired without paid teachers. In Rome, it was used from 500 B. C. to 600 A. D. to designate any value that was homebred, homemade, derived from the commons, and that a person could protect and defend though he neither bought nor sold it on the market (Illich, 1980; 15) .*

Ivan Illich advocated that education should promote and develop culture as he believed that we must look at culture in a much broader sense (Inman, 1999). Education must be directed toward human goals that result in better social consequences for all. Education should make human beings future oriented and critique of contemporary society and institutions. Education should promote to create a better global society, and world citizenship and should focus more on democracy, social consensus, and a group process of learning (Illich, 1971). The purpose of education should be to explore societal issues that affect students as members of society in order that they can build a better world. Education should create a world order in

which people plan their own future as advocated by Illich (Inman, 1999). It should be future rather than past oriented. Education should be directed towards arousing interest in public activism. Ivan Illich stressed that education should promote humanity as humanity is required to live through corporal experience (Inman, 1999). Illich believed that education should promote humility as a base of connection in any society and should help an individual to realize his sense of self. The aims of education according to Illich should be to cultivate and flourish wisdom among students as Illich interprets:

*“Wisdom illuminates man so that he may recognize himself. Approaching wisdom makes the reader radiant”* (Illich, 1993; 10)

Illich urged that it is an authentically human need to understand the world in which we live in order to make decisions about how to live in that world by the process of education. Education should bring radical changes in the lives of human beings and confront controversial issues and should discuss them. Education should examine the future and the possible future realities. Illich advocated that education should enable us for living and experiencing universal brotherhood. The search for wisdom through education is the search for wholeness, a process that continues throughout lives. Education should contribute to every person's complete development - mind, body and spirit; intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality. All people should receive in their childhood and youth an education that equips them to develop their own independent, critical way of thinking and judgments so that they can make up their own minds on the best courses of action in the different circumstances in their lives. Education must bring moral theory into every aspect of our life so that we may *deschool* whole society and humanize it.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Ivan Illich sees the educational system as a prime source of social inequality: only the schools and universities have the financial resources and legal authority to educate. Illich's liberationist programme begins with the sphere of education. He argued for the *deschooling* of education as well of society. Society must be *deschooled* and the responsibility for education must return to the learner. Schooling system should be reformed and education should be result oriented. Briefly speaking, Illich advocated for liberal, radical and technological education which will give learning a human touch and ensure dignity of human values including freedom.

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