DIGITALIZATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Education sector in India has long awaited an overhaul to meet the growing demand for a contemporary education system that is accessible to all. Children and youth in India have in the last decade become increasingly technology-driven, revealing considerable potential and readiness to imbibe and learn using digital media. Digitalization in Higher Education (HE) institutions is an issue that concerns many educational stakeholders. On one hand, digitalization enhances our economic, social and political lives. But on the other hand, it leads to certain negative social impacts. This study has analyzed the movement of digitalization and its contribution in inclusive society.

Keywords: Digital Education, Higher Education, Disparity, Society, Policies

Introduction

Digitalisation is not without complications and barriers. Universities, without a clear vision on digitalisation, are incapable to efficiently respond to the demands and challenges of the 21st century. Some key reasons behind this feebleness are; a lack of trust on digital tools and techniques, unawareness with the new global competitive environment, inability to evolve existing work settings whilst adding new techniques and capabilities, and inhibiting culture to accepting modern technologies and development (Hill et al., 2015; Loebbecke and Picot, 2015; Teo et al., 2008). Besides this, lack of digital literacy is the one another inhibitor to uptake digitalisation. Digital literacy means the skills, knowledge, and confidence to use advanced technology. Though, digitalisation has enabled various innovative teaching techniques, for instance, richer distance learning, Promising digital university 269 flipped classroom, and hybrid teaching models. Yet, academicians don't always show positivity to admit these advancements. Furthermore, IT departments in HEIs, the key handlers of digital initiatives, not always well-equipped to welcome technological advancement (Lea, 2013). Social media is a dynamic platform to raise voices and respond speedily, and up-to-date with the recent market trends for the sake of getting and connecting with customers. Many universities are not taking a real advantage of these communication channels due to an overcomplicated process for social media postings approval or by not giving chance to all academics to be active members by sharing their opinions and views.

Society and Roadblocks of Indian Education System

The role of institutions of higher education in societal development is becoming increasingly significant. In recent years, higher education has isolated itself from the society and there is a need to re-establish and strengthen higher education's close linkages with the society. The Universities need to foster social responsibility and engage in community outreach programmes. Despite constant efforts made by the Government in higher education, the country is facing the challenges of greater opportunities of access to quality higher education through greater investment in infrastructure and recruitment of adequate and good quality faculty, promoting academic reforms, improving governance and institutional restructuring with aims of improving quality and inclusion of hitherto deprived communities. In what ways, India should prioritize higher education agenda to enhance local engagement by the universities? What efforts should be made to promote R&D activities in higher education, which helps regional manufacturing sectors? In what ways, existing educational institutions should be revitalized to play vital role in solving the skill requirements to meet the regional and local labor markets? Please share some working examples of community engagement by institutions of higher learning. While pursuing their education, how can students contribute to their community, village? What do students feel that while doing their studies, they can contribute? After being employed – how do they contribute (Their idea). Such questions are unanswered and can be roadblocks.

Disparity and Education:

For an inclusive higher education efforts should be made to eliminate gender disparities and to significantly reduce urban-rural, inter-regional and inter-social group disparities. This will call for a much larger facilitative and promotional role for the central and state governments as well as the private sector in higher education towards the hitherto marginalized sections of the society. Thus the major emphasis of the policy should be on promoting inclusiveness so as to accommodate more students from the marginalized sections into the ambit of higher education. The gap between men and women in access to higher education has been eliminated in a few states and is lower in urban areas. The education policy shall aim at complete elimination of this gap, at least at the overall level.

Literature Review:

International

Before digitalisation, times are wasted manually (Terras, 2011). The implementation of ICT has presented a lot of opportunities (Ubogu, Klapwijk, Groenewald, Nicholson, McGovern & Liebetrau, 2010; Salavati, 2016). However, this opportunity brings challenges (Salavati, 2016). These opportunities are presented to education institutions, public, private organisations and society in general. The trend in digitalisation has been enjoyed by developed countries and South Africa is now following the trend (Ubogu, Klapwijk, Groenewald, Nicholson, McGovern & Liebetrau, 2010, 2010). According to Molawa (2009), the penetration and diffusion of ICT in South Africa and some other parts of the continent is hampered by lack of standard infrastructure. Digitalisation brings the migration from traditional to technological modes of sourcing out information, ideas and knowledge. This movement provides full access to information and knowledge sources through the World Wide Web (www). Nonetheless, the question remains whether educators (lecturers) and students use these platforms effectively (Bloom & Stout, 2005). The level of digitalisation and ICT penetration in South Africa is not equally distributed across the nine provinces because many of the spaces are rural communities and townships (Molawa, 2009). But according to Glenn and D'Agostino (2008), digital technology innovations will reshape how

teaching content is delivered and learning received. The digital innovation encourages educational institutions to train and advance graduates' skills and knowledge into the new tech-world of knowledge and ideas. The future looks promising as many researchers solidly believe that higher education institutions will be greatly re-shaped through technological innovations (Glenn & D'Agostino, 2008). The innovation is easily increasing access to higher education through use of online learning methods to access university education. Glenn and D'Agostino (2008) state that number of institutions worldwide engaging in online programmes has increased. Having said that, the digitalisation of the decolonised education curriculum will be the proper forum of education for the present and future. Through this strategy, technological education-enabled learning tools and features should be constructed and built on culture-specific technologies. The knowledge would bring about an effective foundation for digital education (Salavati, 2016).

National

Digitalised education plays a crucial role in India. The arrival of internet and sophisticated technology has made a revolutionary change in the education sector. Educational institutions across the country started adopting modern methods of sharing knowledge to the students including smart boards, LCD projectors and so on. The Government of India introduced several programmes like SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, National Digital Library and National Academic Depository for digitalising Education sector. The paper discusses the pros and cons of digital education in India, the current status of online education and the initiatives taken by government for promoting digital education.

Nivedita Jha & Veena Shenoy (2016) has carried out a study to analyze the status of the modern education process in India. They pointed out that the country offers diversity not only in culture and ethnicity but also in purchasing power and affordability of the Indian people. Paweł Małkosa (2013) has carried out a study to analyze role of digital education. He further studied the state of implementation of Digital education in India. The various expected results after implementation of digitalised education was also taken into consideration by the author.

Loopholes in Education System

In India there is lot of disparities in education. On one hand, digitalization enhances our economic, social and political lives. But on the other hand, it leads to certain negative social impacts. One prevalent problem is digital divide – the gap between different social groups and connectivity to internet. The rural areas are not connected with internet on one hand and on the other hand the digitalization in education is aiming at providing education to masses, to rural as well as urban areas. In reality, it is needed to identify whether digitalization really solves the problems of inclusive society? Whether it is removing disparities in education?

The government has come out with initiatives such as Swayam, Swayam Prabha, National Digital Library, National Academic Repository etc. Government on one hand taking lot of initiatives so that access of quality education to masses in India, on the other hand how far it has achieved the goal of access of education and how far it has roadblocks as well as what is the future those questions are still unanswered.

NEP 2020

Indian new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 gives a consolidated framework from primary education to higher education and even to vocational & technical education. Some focus is also given to internet-based e-learning. Access, equity, affordability, accountability, and quality are founding pillars of NEP 2020. The NEP 2020 has been designed in such a way that it matches the idea of United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda for sustainable development,

Designing policy is one side of the coin but the other and the most important side is Implementation of the Policy. Implementation of such robust policy is one of the most difficult tasks in Indian Education System which is already entangled and has its own rigid sub systems which are difficult to change. NEP has opened some closed gates in our Education system but its implementation can further add a few Roadblocks.

Some Positive aspects of Indian Education System

In Indian Education system, every student needs to get through senior secondary examination organized by the states or the central board of school education. The period of the first degree is of 3 years in general education in Commerce or Arts or Science followed by 2 years of masters degree level courses and 3 to 5 years of doctoral degree in the interested field. This can also be replaced by some other higher Education courses like Engineering, Medical Sciences, Law or Chartered Accountancy keeping everything in mind, The choices opted by students are Engineering, Arts, Science (other than Engineering and Commerce respectively). This trend is a Massive improvement while comparing to other developing countries. According to the recent survey of MHRD, India, it is found that “more than 25 million of students are pursuing their higher studies in around 900 universities. Apart from that, there is degree awarding 40026 colleges. Of them 1800 colleges are exclusively for women. There are around 10 state universities for women. There are around 11669 standalone institutions.” These numbers are showing great signs of improvement of research abilities of India.

India holds an important place in the global education industry. India has one of the largest networks of higher education institutions in the world. However, there is still a lot of potential for further development in the education system.

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