

Online Education As One Of The Essential Pre-Requisites For Quality In Higher Education In India

¹Dr. Sarika Sircar

¹ Associate Professor, History, NSCB Govt. Girls' P.G. College, Aliganj, Lucknow

Received: 07 July 2021, Accepted: 15 July 2021, Published with Peer Review on line: 10 Sep 2021

Abstract

Online education is the need of the hour in the field of higher education in India. Already much has been done and much more still remains to be done to encompass every youth of such a big country as India especially in these difficult times of COVID and so that our youth pursuing higher education acquire that competitive edge globally. The government is playing an active role in reframing the ossified system to empower the youth with best possible policies, reforms, initiatives, schemes, missions to provide in-house and out-door quality education to fortify the youth sitting at each and every corner of the diverse nation. The majority of these are equally benefitting the students of basic sciences and humanities, a major component of Higher Education ecosystem in the country.

Keywords- Online Education, Essential Pre-Requisites, Quality In Higher Education, diverse nation.

India is the second largest populous nation of the world with more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 till the latest count and soon it would become the youngest in the world having more than three fourth of its population under 25 years of age. This fraction of our population is our goldmine responsible for 34% of our Gross National Income and it will definitely be going to demand for the right educational infrastructure, development of appropriate skills and adequate opportunities to get jobs or become entrepreneurs for their personal, societal and country's growth. The demographic dividend is never a burden on any nation but a window of opportunity. Empowerment through the right higher education is necessarily a process of inculcating values to equip the learner lead a life that is satisfying to the individual while being in accordance with the cherished values and ideals of the society. Youth empowerment especially in the Indian scenario is imperative not only for national but also for personal development which can be pursued by promoting youth rights, youth activism and their active role in making community decision. The key to youth empowerment is to give them proper education especially higher education and make them employable. We cannot talk about sustainable development, for any nation, without the active role of its youth persons with active hands and heads. Lack of opportunities is just like making them to sit on the margin of society, waiting on the train track for a train that may never come.

Sustainable empowerment of the youngsters of India can be primarily stabilised on the four pillars of education, skills and employment, radical temperamental change and government's policies and initiatives. In the current scenario the Enrolment Rate (GER) in Higher Education (HE) in India is much lower (22 percent) than world's average (28%) and in another couple of years when the country's youth population with less than 25 years of age will be the highest in the world, we aim to enhance our GER

to 30% which is possible only by doubling the number of existing institutions providing tertiary education to make HE accessible.

Education is a nation-building process and digital education is the progressive education for building a healthy India. India is moving towards a global knowledge super power in which educational technology, digital initiatives and virtual classrooms play their prominent roles especially for the people of India. Hence, digital education and virtual learning need to be the essential prerequisites of most of the development programmes in India especially in field of higher education. The Central Government along with State/UT Governments has been constantly working towards socio-educational reforms through diverse programmes of digital education and virtual learning.

There has been a ceaseless march for accelerating the pace of digital education and remote learning initiatives across India. Digital Learning, Virtual Learning, Online Learning, Computer Aided Learning, Learning through ICT, Digital Learning Experience, Digital Learning Resources are the frequently used technologies that have been used in the field of Indian education and learning. Digital technology has boosted the march for global knowledge and use of digital super power. There is a use of digital technology as well as Information Communication Technology (ICT) in diverse aspects of modern progressive higher education.

Contemporary COVID-19 pandemic has yielded the effect of fast-tracking digital initiatives in India. Formal face-to-face traditional education system has been seriously affected with the outbreak of Corona virus and for which digital education and virtual learning are strengthening their strong effects. Generally, digital education is considered as a type of education and learning that is "accompanied by technology or by instructional practice that makes effective use of technology. It encompasses the application of a wide spectrum of practices including blended and virtual learning". Further, digital learning is sometimes confused with online learning or e-learning. Generally, it is a learning strategy that may include any of or a combination of adaptive learning, blended learning, badging and gamification, online learning, e-learning, ICT integrated learning, computer aided learning, personalised learning, learning analytics, learning objects, technology enhanced, open educational resources, virtual reality, augmented reality etc. Use of mobile technologies, and other digital devices have accelerated the pace of digital education and digital learning.

The process of imparting education has gone through a sea change if we look into the last two decades. Our life has become technology-driven and the onset of online courses came as a path-breaker. All one needed was a good internet connection. Digital learning has seeped into the system considerably and has a far-reaching impact towards educating the vast youth population of India. To make India digitally literate, National Digital Literacy Programme has been launched by the Government with the aim of not only bringing about dynamic and integrated platform of digital literacy awareness, but also to build education and capacity programmes that will help communities to take lead in the global digital economy and help them in maintaining the competitiveness and also shape a technologically empowered society. For this initiative, the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) has established Bharat Broadband Network Ltd. (BBNL) to roll out the National Optical Fiber Network (NOFN).

India entered a new era of digitised education through its initiative named SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active -Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). SWAYAM is implemented by Ministry of HRD and aims at offering online courses to Indian citizens by Professors of distinguished educational institutions like IITs, IIMs, and other Central Universities. There is a focus on developing Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) to help students pursue any course of their choice from institutions all over the country and abroad. These courses comprise the latest syllabus taught by eminent academicians as well as industry leaders via virtual classrooms. SWAYAM is a 'Made in India' IT platform which offers interactive courses free of cost from Class IX to post graduation, which can be accessed by anyone, anywhere at any time.

The education market in India currently standing at USD 100 billion presents an opportunity for technological advancement in terms of online education. There has been a significant rise in the internet population in past many years with an overall internet penetration of around 60 percent. The spread of online education especially in field of higher education will provide an opportunity for social learning, employability and entrepreneurship, thus, making them jobs ready. Online education in field of higher education is driven by the demand for quality education. The online channel provides a conducive conducive educational avenue for students of far off places also who require focused and individual learning. Most importantly, online education does not discriminate among the students. Any course is equally available to all students. Thus online higher education makes everyone more equal and bridges all gap among them.

Thus online or digital learning in higher education is slowly but definitely becoming the direction everyone is stepping towards and today in post-covid times one can say its pace has surely increased very much. Though India is at a nascent stage when igit comes to digital education compared to developed nations, nonetheless it's growing at a substantially rapid rate of about 55 percent. Ed-tech is certainly ushering the new age of learning in India. The main reasons for the growth of digital learning can be summed up as follows. With nearly a billion people on mobile phones and over 200 million mobiles connected to the internet, there has been a considerable rise in digital learning. The use of best-in-class content, real-time learning and feedback methods, and personalised instructions has encouraged online learning. Digital learning aims to break the numerous barriers that are preventing people from receiving quality education in the physically bound classrooms.

Hybrid, collaborative and online learning processes are changing education. With hybrid, collaborative online learning, students get the on-campus experience and get 'the best of both worlds'. 'Live and interactive' digital learning empowers the learners to receive par excellence, quality education anytime and anywhere. Free online courses open up avenues for both education providers and students. Such offerings are changing the way India learns by giving students an edge in learning, benefitting their careers. Social media is also being used as a learning tool. Students can critique and share feedback on each other's assignments, work in collaboration to create content that can be easily accessed. This also gives them an opportunity to ask questions and have multiple responses shared on real-time basis. Social media helps in making the students aware of the current happenings, concerns, issues, social activities and prospective employment.

Digital or online education is breaking the numerous barriers that are preventing students from receiving quality education in the physically bound classrooms. 'Direct to Device' technology will empower these students to get quality education, anytime and anywhere. It will enable them to save time, by having more freedom to move at their own pace. With the Digital India programme's vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, the education sector in India is poised to witness major growth in the years to come. Technology-led reach and easy access will bring about a socio-economic difference in the lives of Indian learners.

Thus online or digital education is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within the situations. Digitally literate persons would be able to operate computers/digital access devices (like tablets, smart phones, etc.), send and receive emails, browse internet, access Government services, search for information, undertaking cashless transactions, etc. and hence, use IT to actively participate in the process of nation building.

The online channel for higher education in India explores almost everything from secondary education to hobbies such as cookery classes and language learning both in informal and formal forms. It also provides an important platform for preparation of various competitive examinations in national as well as international level. There are five major categories of education with potential for significant online adoption. Reskilling and online certification courses currently accounts for a significant part of the online education market in India with a share of 38 percent. Education in India is an indisputable step forward to empower our communities with capacity building and training programmes and make them digitally literate. It is a foundation to facilitate deployment of citizen services through digital means. To match with the need of the day, it is important to create a digital data house at every community level to make them economically viable, and digital education is the right way to approach that. It is for sure a fundamental move to generate social, cultural and economic advantages for all communities. Online or digital higher education not only initiates entrepreneurship and brings uniform digital literacy but also impacts the socio-economic strata in all regions. It uplifts the standard of living and plays an important role in alleviation of poverty and gender discrimination everywhere apart from the main role of uplifting via higher education.

Education has been seen as a core necessity of individuals, social groups, nations and human society. The modern world views it as a basic human right. Since the formation of the Indian Republic, most landmark committees or commissions on education have unequivocally underscored the idea of education for all. Many crucial concerns of contemporary education find mention in earlier policy documents too. Yet, a study of previous reports and policies makes it amply clear that the educational journey of our country has been quite uneven, and many genuine aspirations have remained unrealised even after seven decades of independence. It would be unfair to claim that our predecessors did not act upon these concerns with reasonable sincerity, at least at the planning level. Yet, in a vast, populous and diverse country of staggering socio-economic differentials, the execution of policy is always a challenge. This is clearly reflected in the recurrence of core educational concerns in reports or policy documents published since the early 1950s.

The last national education policy was created in 1986. During these 34 years, the world has changed in unprecedented ways. Revolutionary alterations in the world's political economy, fuelled by

technological developments, have significantly contributed to the dismantling of the barriers of gender, class, caste, culture, geographical distance, and so forth. All this has created a strong sense of aspiration and hope among the people. Rapid economic developments after 1991, the year when India opened economically, have triggered a high demand for knowledge and specialised skills. During the two-and-a-half decades since economic liberalisation, no comprehensive national vision could be conceived to address the gross systemic inadequacies impeding the momentum of an aspirational and restless India.

In the above background, our government gave priority to a broad-based and futuristic national education policy. The framing of this policy was a mammoth exercise and this policy of 2020 released on 29 July 2020, is a historic and ambitious document. With an eye on the future, it speaks to all aspects of education during our times. This policy is in many ways radically different from all its predecessors, and it looks at our educational requirements in a new way.

The makers of the policy have been very versatile regarding higher education. A distinctive feature of higher education is that it produces 'knowledge resources' through which all education takes place, resources used by society to chart out its progress over time. The concerns of higher education are quite diverse and complex. In order to keep pace and be ahead of others, we need to focus more vigorously on the complex matrix of higher education. The Committee working on the policy has succinctly identified the role of higher education as 'promoting human as well as social well-being and developing India as envisioned in its Constitution- a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured and human nation, upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all'. According to the makers of this policy, some of the salient problems encumbering the higher education system in India are rigid separation of disciplines, limited teacher and institutional autonomy, lack of focus on quality and relevant research and poor institutional governance and to address all of these online education in higher field is invaluable.

The policy envisages a 'complete overhaul' of the system. It was naturally anticipated that revamping of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and educational administration would be recommended by the policy makers. The policy lays out a fairly radical transformation of the higher education structure. Multidisciplinary, flexibility and autonomy are central to this reform. Through these key ingredients, freshness and vitality are accorded to this stage of education. The decision to do away with the adamant walls between different disciplines and the provision of freedom to exit and enter courses, as these will be credit-based and will truly liberate learners and in all this online education is a very essential part of it without which this system can't work effectively.

Apart from necessary online education, now the new policy grants them freedom to choose what to learn, how to learn and when to learn. Now, one can opt to study Sanskrit along with Mathematics or Music with Physics. The earlier segregation of streams, rather regimented, did not allow for any formal or institutional interface between the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. This did not allow for a wholesome development of individuals.

Online education is very useful in the field of research also. Research is at the foundation of knowledge creation and it plays a key role in sustaining and further uplifting any human society. Research, both in fundamental and applied disciplines is essential for progress, especially in today's fast-

developing world. In order to create a robust ecosystem for high-quality research, the policy envisages the creation of a National Research Foundation (NRF).

Thus online education facilitates quality and efficiency in higher education and leads to better exposure especially in field of vocational education also. Large-scale employment creation as well as the creation of higher knowledge is our necessity. Our ever-expanding and ever-evolving economy requires workers and professionals with diverse and specialised skill sets. Despite Mahatma Gandhi's emphatic underscoring of vocational education, we have not been able to create any effective synchronisation of vocational education and 'mainstream' education. Now 'quality vocational education will be integrated smoothly into higher education'. The 'development of vocational capacities will go hand in hand with development of 'academic' or other capacities'.

In this endeavour online education in higher education has played a very important role. Highlighting the equal importance of vocational education and higher learning, the American public intellectual and statesman, John W. Gardner had made a seminal point in his book, 'Excellence Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?'. Thus the new higher education policy of which online education is an important pre-requisite is ensuring its quality and excellence and is truly vocational oriented and promoting equality as being equally accessible to all.

References:-

- Yojana, February, 2017, pg. 40.
- "Online Education in India: 2021", KPMG Report, May 2017.
- "How Digital Education is taking over India : Impact of social media, increased learner application power and more", Institute of Digital & Mobile Marketing, January 11, 2017.
- Websites: www.cbse.nic.in, www.ignou.ac.in, www.mhrd.gov.in, www.mib.gov.in, www.moe.gov.sg, ["http://www.ncert.nic.in/"](http://www.ncert.nic.in/) HYPERLINK ["http://www.ncert.nic.in/"](http://www.ncert.nic.in/) HYPERLINK ["http://www.ncert.nic.in/.nic.in](http://www.ncert.nic.in/.nic.in), www.unised.in, www.unised.it.
- Kurukshetra, February, 2020, pg. 18.
- Yojana, June, 2017, pg. 54, 55.
- Yojana, September, 2020, pg. 6-9.