

Chapter 24

Learning Mode of the Future: Open and Distance Education– Role of Libraries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights present and future dimensions of lifelong learning for skills development in all domains of professional, vocational, and liberal education. Libraries should be essentially integrated with different types of learning pathways and learning institutions, including ODL (Open and Distance Learning) institutions. Digital learning and self-directed learning also require informational support from libraries and knowledge networks for helping the budding knowledge workers in their decision making.

EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

In a socialist, democratic and egalitarian society the right to education belongs to all. Inherent urge for knowledge and to develop through learning is beneficial for human beings. Education is an instrument for propagation of culture and the development of human resources. It is the dominating trait which distinguishes humans from rest of the fellow mammals. Thus, it is an obligation of the society and state to create and

provide access to this mechanism to satisfy this primal human urge. Education is not only an agent of social change, but an economic power in itself. It empowers individuals and nations. It is the only genuine means to achieve constant socio-economic growth and prosperity. And is a panacea for many social ills. In this globalised world higher education has become a commodity having a huge and expanding market. We need skill based and growth based education.

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INDIAN SITUATION

In India there are about 550 Universities and 26,000 Colleges of varying size and quality imparting higher education to produce good citizens, workers, leaders, preachers, civil servants, social activists, managers, teachers, researches and self entrepreneurs in every sector. National Knowledge Commission (2005-2008) has already recommended to expand their number to 1500 of which 50 are to be national universities (NKC, 2007a). However this is more likely to happen in the private sector or in the PPP mode. India's 86 billion US dollars education sector is increasingly joined by private players in its rapid expansion. Increased government spending and fresh interest from foreigners who are pumping in money, and large investments in services, technology and infrastructure play the catalyst. The 11th FYP (2007-2012), aptly called the Education Plan, invested 900% more in this sector than in the previous plan. As a result the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) rose to 12.24 from the mere 9. The 12th FYP, called the peoples' plan, intends to universalize secondary education by 2017. But D.S. Kothari's dream of 6% GDP allocation to education remains a pipe dream in a country where 3/4th of its population is dismally poor and the biggest portion of the budget is spent on security.

An Estimate of Workforce Requirements

One of the prime challenges for India's surging growth is severe skills shortage – spanning all levels, from management to frontline operations, and all sectors, from IT to fast food, which along with inadequate infrastructure, poor governance and absence of employable skills amongst university graduates could mar the shining India story (Blom & Saeki, 2011). According to an estimate we need about 530 million skilled workers within the next two decades (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2010). In India only about 5% of

students have access to any vocational training as compared to about 60% in developed countries, so the gap is very big (Planning Commission, 2007; Nilekani, 2010).

The National Skill Development Council (NSDC) is already on a course to create 150 million skilled workforce by 2022 – the stipulated target year. To achieve this GER must be raised to 20% by the end of the 12th FYP (2012-2017) and to 30% by 2020 (Planning Commission, 2007). For this we additionally require 1000 new universities and 45,000 colleges of every size and variety. The higher education system still enrolls only 12.24% of the eligible students in the 18-23 age group. It is far less than the world average of 24%. In the developed world it ranges between 40 to 80%. Talent in the country is evenly distributed across the groups and regions as evident from the 2011 version of the KBC show hosted by Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan. It is only the unequal access and lack of opportunities to some which create inequality. The current issues of the higher education are open and equal access, content and quality, and research and innovation. It may not be out of place to mention that India does not figure anywhere in the 2011 list of 200 top ranking universities of the world. Therefore, the present system needs restructuring. Alternative modes of instructional delivery, modes of finance and good governance are some of the topics which need serious attention. The bulk of higher education is governed by the state universities and they are always lacking financial support from their governments. Long term educational planning is essential for better, stable and effective results (Prasad, 2011).

Problems of the Traditional System

The traditional system is not only inadequate in terms of intake capacity, but equally weak in developing inherent potentials of the learner and the society at large. It is mostly because of its rigidity and is also getting degenerated in face of changing

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