



RETROFITTING ICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INDISPENSABLE FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

At the turn of the 21st century, numerous significant changes have been brought through the use of ICT and its many ramifications in higher education and their potential transforming impact on the society. However, learners, recognized as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, women and Muslims in India occupy relatively the lowest rung more particularly in the educational ladder. In the context, for years together, the issue of what counts as robust and inclusive higher education system has been debated and still concerns teachers, educators, practitioners and other researchers. Ostensibly, the educational processes and practices in tribal areas are quite distinct from that of any other part(s) of the country. Apparently, many universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning and research have unequivocally recognized the rationale of information and communication technology for increased accessibility, enhanced responsiveness and more importantly improved quality education for all. The increasingly broad consensus about the transforming potentials and benefits of ICT in higher education plays crucial role in opening the windows of opportunity, learning and development for all. The paper is designed with an objective to develop insights of retrofitting ICT tools, technologies and other applications and appreciate the amelioration in the existing pedagogical strategies in higher education for inclusive society. In the context, technology driven instructional strategies and pedagogical practices will not only empower institutions of higher learning and research but also encompass communities of dalits, tribals and other marginalized sections of the society in terms of participation and inclusion.



KEY WORDS : *Information and Communication Technology; Pedagogy; Higher Education; Inclusive Society.*

OVERVIEW

Today, a considerably huge population in the country is deprived of higher education and research and thereby development. The disparity in higher education against the marginalized sections i.e. SCs, STs, women and Muslim minorities is said to be relatively more glaring compared with other sections of the society. It is important to note that any mission towards growth and development has to be inclusive in nature encompassing both the privileged and the under-privileged in the society. Higher education is an optional final stage of formal learning that occurs after completion of secondary education(Wikipedia, 2018, p.01). Undoubtedly, higher education has been a major driving force to the development of a significantly functional and inclusive society. With this realization, higher education aims to cater to the needs, expectations and aspirations of all individuals and communities within a state system. Hence, providing every citizen with access to information and harnessing technology to innovatively deliver services within the Indian context will be the key to driving inclusive growth in an increasingly digital world(Deloitte, 2011, pp.15). As a result, it is observed that by every successive government, huge efforts are made to unfold the

human potentials while minimizing the chasm between the haves and have-nots. The bottom line is that education at high quality research universities will remain expensive for a while, certainly till we learn to consider technology and people better(Rajan, Raghvan G., 2016, p.29).

An efficient and effective higher education system thus lies at the root of knowledge creation, dissemination and application in the context of emerging scenario. Enhanced participation of people in the education, training and learning process leads to better outcomes and more importantly inclusion in the educational ladder. One of the major challenges before the Indian higher education system is creating a congenial environment that not only produces the graduates with expected learning outcomes but also allocates and shares the values in a collective harmonious way. Therefore, the provision of adequate educational transaction for dalits, adivasis and other marginalized sections of the society has to be taken on priority basis.

HIGHER EDUCATION

As a powerful tool, higher education through its various curricular and co-curricular activities aims at creating, nurturing and strengthening the individuals within the society to respond towards the emerging needs, expectations and requirements of the upcoming generations. In the first instance, it will be necessary that the concept of education itself should have considerably wider frame than what is expected in the context of advanced areas(Thakur, D & Thakur, D.N. (Ed.) 2009, p.22). In the context, the evidence based on education preserved for a few refers to the retrofitting of the whole provision and practices in education and training.

India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facility of education and training in almost all aspects of human creative and intellectual endeavors: arts and humanities; natural, mathematical and social sciences, engineering; medicine; dentistry; agriculture; education; law; commerce and management; music and performing arts; national and foreign languages; culture; communications etc.(World Bank, 2007, pp.01).

Considering the requirements of the social objectives, higher education institutions need to empower all the sections of the society. Historically, ICT has tended to be introduced in higher education first to support administrative data processing requirements, such as student registration, financial management, office word processing, and internal communications(Bates, AW., 2000, pp. 83). Increasing access to higher education through ICTs has got momentum in the current pedagogical practices. New technology has emerged to supplement and empower the educative process now a days. This will enable networking of different types of libraries and setting up of a National Repository of Bibliographic Records and a centralized collaborative virtual enquiry-handling system using the latest ICT(NKC, 2009, pp.32).

The business of educational transaction is increasingly becoming dependant on emerging technological tools, devices and applications. The online system for examination and evaluation, accessible even in the remotest corner of a region, would further normalize the uneven standards of education and grading system(Bamezai, RNK, 2012, pp. 28). A rapid expansion of higher education in the country is the need of the hour to respond to the changing needs of the considerably increasing clientele.

INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Inclusive society as commonly understood is a body of individuals leading to efforts to make growth more balanced across the communities. Thus, inclusive society here refers to the sustainable growth pattern responsive to its all encompassing individuals in the pursuit of education, health, security and above all prosperity. In the context, higher education and inclusivity is closely inter linked and if managed in a coordinated way, will lead to increased access, enhanced responsiveness and more importantly equity in the society.

Our universities are expected to attain global parity in average enrolment, as a sub-critical component with optimum use of land and infrastructure, which could lead to a substantial higher intake and

enrolment(Bamezai, RNK, 2012, pp. 25). Equally crucial is the agenda of development which has to be linked with the all encompassing individuals of the society. There comes the issue of framework for inclusive society.

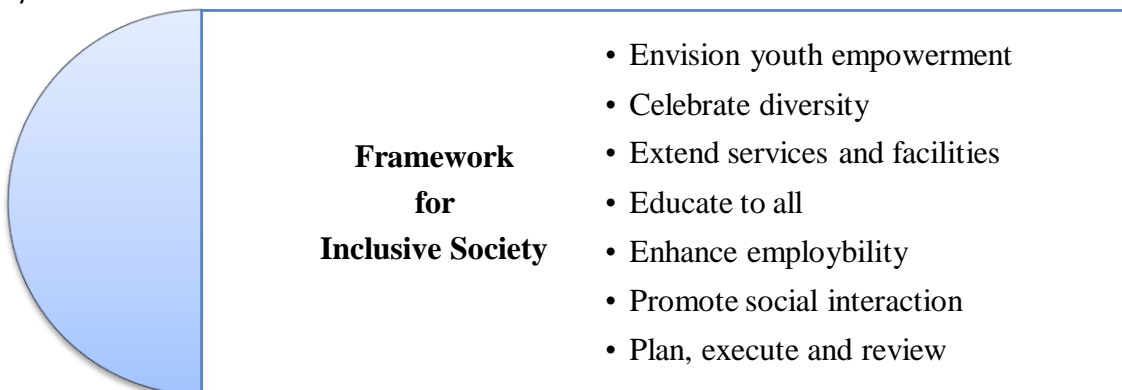


FIGURE 1: FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

As mentioned in figure 1, the framework for inclusive society may be laid on envisioning the youth empowerment, celebrating diversity in the society, extending services and facilities, offering education and developmental programme to all, enhancing employability, promoting social interaction and more importantly planning, executing and reviewing on the basis of feedback received.

A tribal youth graduating from an elementary institution should be in a position, as far as possible, to deal on terms of equality with the outside world and should be able to appreciate the intricacies of the new system(Thakur, D & Thakur, D.N. (Ed.) 2009, p.22). Reiterating the importance of inclusion, a broader framework has to be worked out. Therefore, gearing up the machinery of higher education has to fulfill the expectations and aspirations of individuals to provide opportunities and elevate them to newer heights.

RETROFITTING ICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The access and utilization ICT in higher education encourages centres of expertise where practitioners are engaged in the process of curriculum transaction in an effective and efficient way. Technology has become pervasive – e-mail, online library services and e-journals, access to various services of the university through its portal, etc. have become an integral part of higher education, both open and conventional universities(Basu, S. & Srivastava, M., 2012, pp.17).

At the outset, there is a realization on the part of higher education institutions that the new ICT and its many ramifications have the potential to impact on both the process and product of development. The following figure precisely illustrates the sub-critical components in retrofitting ICT in higher education.

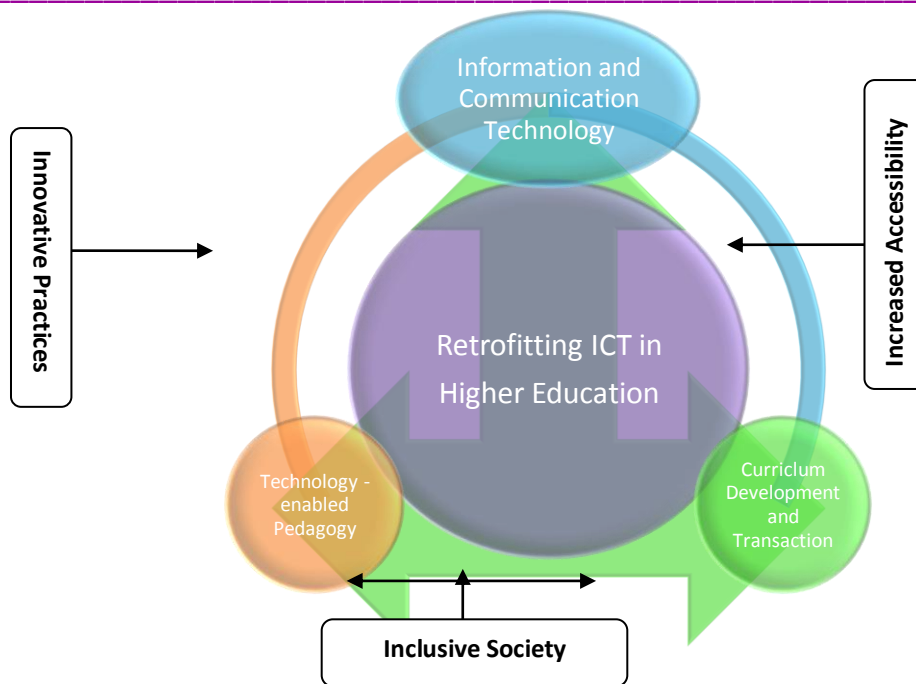


FIGURE 2: RETROFITTING ICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Retrofitting ICT in higher education with an emphasis on inclusivity is the need of the hour. Further, wherever feasible, information and communication technology should be made more accessible to teachers, students and the administration(NKC, 2009, pp.14). It is true that there are attempts at making a provision of ICT component mandatory at all levels of education.

PROBABLE CHALLENGES

The present-day higher education in the country has characterized by some achievements, many failures, and incredible potentialities and, of course, a few challenges. India has been trying to build a viable system of higher education rooted to new ICT and its many ramifications to respond to the needs of all the sections of society.

Given the context, a focus on inclusive social development through ICT enabled higher education may be of considerable challenge.

Complexity of issues and challenges involved in the reshaping of higher education and its infrastructure in the country necessitate more discussion, more consultation and more reflection on a wider scale.

Attracting and retaining tech-trained teachers in the institutions has been an issue before the policy planners, leaders and other practitioners.

Capacity building of teachers, educators and other instructors engaged in higher education has also been a major challenge in the establishment of ICT enabled higher education institutions.

Simplified and convenient procedure of technology integration has to be adopted while prioritizing reorganization of higher education in the country.

What is primarily needed is greater investment of resources for the development and nurturance of talent of those who are placed in the adverse socio-economic circumstances by the accident of birth(Chaudhari, U.S., 2016, p.12). Broadening the scope of community engagement in resource generation has to be a major concern in higher education.

CONCLUSION

Even as the reorganization and redesigning of higher education is justified, desirability of all encompassing communities, sections, groups and individuals to ensure inclusivity cannot be overlooked. The educational leaders and policy makers have to take initiatives to improve not only accessibility but also affordability to all sections of the society in higher education. As long as the vision of inclusion remains unfulfilled, the overall growth and development has to remain immaterialized. While bridging the gap between the privileged and the under privileged, institutions of higher education have to deliberate, discuss and decide the innovative strategies to use ICT in enhancing knowledge delivery infrastructure benefitting all including dalits, adivasis, women and Muslims in the country. Restructuring existing institutions of higher education and research on these lines would not only reduce the physical resource implications but also create a harmonious relationship between the privileged and under-privileged of the society.

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