

ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GENERATING KNOWLEDGEABLE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

On the eve of a new century, there is an unprecedented demand for and a great diversification in higher education, as well as an increased awareness of its vital importance for the sociocultural and economic development, and for building the future, for which the younger generations will need to be equipped with new skills, knowledge, and ideas. Higher education includes 'all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities'. Everywhere higher education is faced with great challenges and difficulties related to financing, equity of conditions at access into and during the course of studies, improved staff development, skills-based training, enhancement and preservation of quality in teaching, research and services, relevance of programmes, employability of graduates, establishment of efficient co-operation agreements and equitable access to the benefits of international co-operation. At the same time, higher education is being challenged by new opportunities relating to technologies that are improving the ways in which knowledge can be produced, managed, disseminated, accessed and controlled. Equitable access to these technologies should be ensured at all levels of education systems.

KEYWORDS: Higher Education, All Types of Studies, Training, Post-Secondary Level

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge society is based on the need for knowledge distribution, access to information and capability to transfer information into knowledge. Knowledge distribution is one of the essential requirements of the knowledge society. It has to be based on equity and non-discrimination, justice and solidarity. It implies an understanding of knowledge as the central pillar of the knowledge society. Knowledge is more than information. It requires information processing with the specific aim of obtaining the conceptual understanding of life support systems within a specific cultural system. The global validation of information is immanent to the knowledge society. So, access to the global information pool is the main driving force for the development of knowledge society.

Level of Higher Education

Higher education has given ample proof of its viability over the centuries and of its ability to change and to induce change and progress in society. Owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities, and nations. Higher education itself is confronted therefore with formidable challenges and must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to

undertake, so that our society, which is currently undergoing a profound crisis of values, can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality.

Demand for Improving Higher Education

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Nature of Learners

Except for a small proportion, most are full-time students. Their lifestyles allow them to adjust to the demands of the institutions they study in and the call of faculty as to when and where learning is to occur. The lucky ones amongst them are able to express a limited choice in the courses that they can enroll during the three- or four-year period they spend on campuses. The not so lucky, mostly found in the developing world, may not even have that choice; their studies and the time-frame are strictly prescribed for them. They are expected to subject themselves to a set of assessment sessions, whether or not they are ready for them, and if they do not meet some un-stated requirements they are considered failures. This tradition is long-standing.

The Four Pillars of Learning

Learning to be	= The right of self-identification and self-definition
Learning to know	= The right to self-knowledge
Learning to do	= The right to self-development
Learning to live together	= The right to self-determination

An indigenous people move into the next millennium, their aspirations partake of the benefits of globalization, without giving up their identity and dignity, must be respected

An Unmet Demand

Other developing countries are in a much more dire state. To be a globally competitive economy, the renewal of people's knowledge, especially those in the workforce, is vital. If we also factor in the need to build an informed and knowledgeable citizenry for the functioning of healthy democracies, then India's demand for increased educational

opportunities, like that of all other developing countries, is truly staggering. No conventional system of educational delivery can meet this volume. Using technology may provide some relief.

Conventional Universities

Increasingly utilizing the backbone of a well-developed technological infrastructure, large numbers of campus-based institutions that never before engaged in distance education are now entering the field. In one survey of only North American institutions, some 16,000 courses were discovered to be available online. Many of these courses disappear within a semester and many new ones appear overnight. All courses so offered are dependent on the ICTs at both ends of the teaching/learning equation. Many of these institutions also use the technology to add quality too, and hopefully reduce the cost of, their classroom teaching.

Changing Patterns of Learning

Full-time study within the time-tabled constraints of classrooms is only accessible to a few; for many who wish to study, learning will necessarily have to be at a time and place of their choice. Globally, some 7,200 individual, institutional provisions available to, and used by, about 20 million learners are a measure of the growth and demand for flexible, non-full-time studies.

Just-In-Time Training

The rapid changes taking place in the workplace will require training to be delivered quickly. Such training must be high speed, low cost and capable of reaching small and large groups. Traditional ways of delivering training are time-consuming, labor intensive, socially disruptive and costly. Distance education offers a solution.

Information Explosion

Those who study these developments say that the total amount of information that becomes available doubles every four to five years. Stating it another way, the total of all human knowledge that was available to an undergraduate in 1997 will be less than 1% of what will be available to a student in the year 2050. Teachers have to become experts in helping learners navigate this sea of information rather than pretending to be effective transformers of that information into knowledge for their students. Students must be trained to bring about that transformation. Those who survive this information explosion will be those able to deal with it effectively, and even more importantly, turn it into knowledge.

Institutional Considerations and Challenges

The first challenge is the re-orientation of our teachers and the pedagogy they apply to their vocation. The fraternity still has to come to terms with a new type of learner and a learning environment that encourages the student to be independent.

The second challenge is to change the nature and structure of our 'teaching' organizations. Their traditions of teaching and their views on learning have resulted in organizational structures almost completely centered on the faculty.

The third challenge is to remove the 'time' driven element from today's schools, colleges, and universities. These are ruled by time, prescribing when, in his/her life, a student can or is ready to learn and the length of time required for learning. In the desired (new) learning paradigm, learning becomes the primary driving force and, since learning can occur

at any time and at any place 24 hours every day, the constraints of time are removed. The technologies allow those who provide education to break the rule of time.

The fourth challenge is to overcome the perceptions and the fear of faculty to the changing nature of their roles and values as well as the rewards in the new learning environment. There is a real. Though unfounded, fear on the part of faculty about losing total control of the teaching and learning environment... Learner centrality in the educational environment does pose enormous challenges to the teacher. It requires pedagogical skills, especially in a technology-mediated environment for which many of today's teachers are either inadequately or totally unprepared. Serious steps must be taken to reduce the anxiety of teachers from a development so crucial to academic wellbeing.

The last challenges have to be accessible to the technologies (telephone, television, radio, Internet) by learners. Even though we are in the 21st century, some 500 million people may not have made their first telephone call, let alone use the Internet.

CONCLUSIONS

In the new knowledge society, at least in economically well-developed nations, learning can no longer be the monopoly of the 18-25 age groups nor can it be limited to full-time study. An increasing number of students can be expected to be part-time, employed, above 25 and making a late entry into higher education. In addition to these, many who are today's non-participants in education will need to be brought into the fold if we are at all serious about offering all people equal opportunity. Such a diversity of learners will require courses to be organized so that they are flexible, can be studied off-campus and credits received to be portable. These students arrive at the study with skills (to learn by themselves), knowledge (of themselves and what they want) and experience (to enrich the curriculum and the learning environment). In other words, they are as many contributors to the learning as they are receivers of knowledge. In this (knowledge) society, everyone will participate in education or training (formal or informal) throughout life. It would be a society characterized by high standards, but with low failures. Such a society will offer a seamless canvass for individuals to start their learning anywhere on the canvass and exit at any point. To switch metaphors, they will be on a ladder of continuing attainment.

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