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Securing the Future through Lifelong Learning: Some Indian Viewpoints

Geeta Nair

Abstract

This research paper focuses an emerging trend of distance education and online learning witnessed by several nations. The area is covered under Mode I of the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and is fast gaining currency across the globe with major players like the established ones of the West; along with emerging nations like India from the East. It also represents Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals to be attained by 2030. This makes perfect economic sense as it synchronizes all stakeholders' interests by matching rising demand and aspirations of the youth with not so flexible supply of higher education services in our quest for people-centric and inclusive development. The costs and logistics also create a 'win-win' situation for all. Adult education is the greatest beneficiary as 'second chances' are created for the ones who the first one; thereby widening people's choices and opportunities to nurture human resource development. This macro trend is qualitatively enhanced by sharing a micro-level experiment of 'reaching the unreached' based on the preliminary findings of my Minor research project. Conference Sub-theme: Social sciences, education, multidisciplinary: Others.

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eywords: distance education, win-win situation, second chances, Minor research.

1. Introduction

People-centric development holds the key to sustainable and equitable futures in sync with the UNDP goals of caring for the people and the planet. The transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from 2000-2015 to the ongoing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from 2015-2030 requires continuous investments in education. This paper focuses on lifelong and distance education for guaranteeing development for growing nations in Asia. Lifelong learning may be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life: learning that is flexible, diverse, and available at different times and in different places. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life (i.e. post-compulsory education). This definition is based

on Delors' (1996) four 'pillars' of education for the future.

Learning to know - mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge.

Learning to do - equipping people for the types of work needed now and the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments.

Learning to live together, and with others - peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion.

Learning to be - education contributing to a person's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation, and spirituality.

Lifelong learning can instill creativity, initiative and responsiveness in people thereby enabling them to show adaptability in post-industrial society through



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enhancing skills to manage uncertainty, communicate across and within cultures, sub-cultures, families, and communities; and negotiate conflicts. Thus, the emphasis is on learning to learn and the ability to keep learning for a lifetime.

The European Commission (2001: 9) found that lifelong learning has “Four broad and mutually supporting objectives: personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability”. In this regard, lifelong learning has life wide dimensions that transcend narrow economic and vocational aspects.

The European Lifelong Learning Initiative defines lifelong learning as

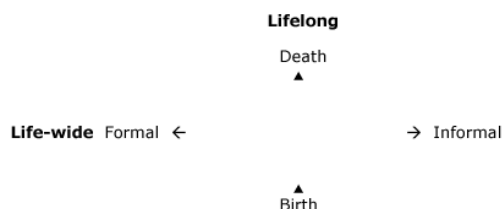
“ ... a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles circumstances, and environments. ”

(Watson,2003:3)

In Sweden, the National Agency for Education has put forward a conceptual framework for both lifelong learning and life-wide as it is seen to take a holistic view of education and recognizes learning from different environments. As shown in Figure 1, it consists of two dimensions (Skolverket, 2000: 19):

1. Lifelong learning recognizing that individuals learn throughout a lifetime, and
2. Life-wide learning recognizing the formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Figure 1: Dimensions of lifelong learning



The lifelong dimension is relatively non-problematic, as it simply comprises what an individual learns throughout life. It is widely accepted that as knowledge and skills become

obsolete, individuals continuously update their competencies in a process of learning.

2. Research Objectives

- To study the importance of lifelong learning;
- To focus on distance education for development;
- To analyze the micro foundations of educational institutions in terms of pilot projects;
- To bring out the growing power of Asia;
- To recommend ways of achieving SDGs.

3. Research Methodology

- Secondary data analysis
- Primary data and fieldwork of 9000 students and 50 staff from 2020-2023
- Qualitative tools of questionnaires and detailed personal interviews
- Pilot study

4. Review of Literature

Literature review shows that lifelong learning has always held a place of prominence in the developed nations of the European Union and America. Modern trends show the enhanced use of the life-wide dimension, that is more complex, as it embraces an extensive range of learning settings and contexts ranging from non- formal to formal learning environments that are set out in the following Table:

Table 2: Formal, non-formal and informal learning

Formal	Non-formal	Informal
ACE institutions	Labour market programs	Clubs
Universities	Professional associations	Libraries
VET providers	On-the-job training	Museums
High schools	Work experience programs	Art galleries
Primary schools	Volunteer organizations	Playgrounds
Pre-schools	Childcare centers	Families
U3As	Learning circles	Elder care

The distinction between formal and non- formal learning environments is about where learning takes place. Formal learning occurs within institutions established primarily to deliver education and training often leading to recognized outcomes and



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qualifications. Non-formal learning has intended education and training outcomes; however, the setting is outside dedicated learning institutions.

Informal learning is distinguishable by intent. It can occur almost anywhere, but as a by-product of other activities. It is often unplanned and without explicit emphasis on learning, yet may still lead to the acquisition of valuable skills, knowledge and attitudes.

This analysis of lifelong learning differs from that postulated by the OECD which classifies formal learning as a program of study that is recognized through a qualification; non-formal learning as a program of study that is not recognized through a qualification, and informal learning as that which is achieved outside an organized program (Watson 2003: 2).

Citizenship, democracy, and lifelong learning are among the most recurrent words in the development discourse and practice in the 21st century. However, review of existing literature will show that across the world, these terms carry on a range of meanings as they are used in different contexts. This field is not a new concern to the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE). In September 1952, the very first seminar the Institute organized was entitled *Adult Education Towards Developing and Strengthening Social and Political Responsibilities*. In the aftermath of World War II, relearning democratic practices became one of the main challenges for adult education. Through the years, the Institute has sought to address the different dimensions of democracy and education by relating it to areas like literacy, lifelong education, women's empowerment, inter-cultural dialogue, and inter-generational learning.

A revisit was done via a seminar on *Strengthening Democracy and Critical Citizenship- through Lifelong Learning* that focused on the trio of **CITIZENSHIP, DEMOCRACY AND LIFELONG LEARNING**. The main objective of the seminar was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between democracy and education in the context of lifelong learning, and to promote

creative practices of social integration. Pertinent questions like “how adult education and lifelong learning could contribute to democratization” or “how best to teach/learn democracy” or “how does one teach citizenship” or “how adult education can help in the formation of critical citizenship” continue to be raised and take on a more urgent tone as we are witness to all sorts of transgressions of democracy and the persistence of “democracy deficit.”

The UNESCO reexamined the new challenges in our globalizing world in its Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V). As one of the ten themes of CONFINTEA V, adult education and democracy remained a critical area of concern with the dominant discourse on lifelong learning to retool skills to help in promoting employability matched by lifelong learning as means of promoting and strengthening democratic practices, social inclusion, and critical citizenship. The mission of UIE is to promote lifelong learning as a means of transforming societies where every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, plays an active role in promoting, strengthening, and sustaining democratic practices; especially for the South bloc nations.

Adult and Community Learning, Education, and Training or Adult Community Education (ACE), encompasses the following facets:

1. Learner-centered, i.e. people learn most effectively where they are actively involved in decisions about the management, content, style, and delivery of their learning;
2. Responsive to community, i.e. ACE supports local communities and communities of interest in identifying and meeting the educational needs of their members. It strengthens communities by building diverse skills and capabilities, including enterprise skills and community management skills;
3. Accessible and inclusive, i.e. learning is provided in an environment that is open and informal, with an emphasis of equality among learners and educators. It recognizes a special responsibility for those people whose learning needs are not a priority for schools,



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the vocational education and training system or higher education and offers pathways to learning in the more formalized education system;

4. Diverse, i.e. programmes include literacy, basic education, English and other languages, study skills, vocational preparation, training, skills development, continuing education, liberal education, and general adult education. It also recognizes the important contribution to community learning made by groups that are involved in many and varied subject areas, such as crafts, arts, hobbies, and recreation;

5. Offered by many and varied types of organizations in many settings, eg. adult and community education centers and colleges, neighborhoods houses and community centers, churches and schools, community service organizations, community groups and many more;

6. Flexible, i.e. it is entrepreneurial and user-focused, and has a long tradition of innovative delivery based on providing learning at times, in places and ways that are appropriate to the learner (adapted from National Policy: Adult and Community Education 1997).

5. The Indian Scenario

India has a huge potential in the arena of lifelong learning, adult education, and distance education due to the largely unmet demand as there is a dearth of affordable quality institutions of higher education. Rising aspirations of generation next, as well as lost opportunities of the present or past generations due to ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, regressive socio-cultural structures, and lack of political will. The World Development Report (WDR, 2007) in cognizance with these trends in developing nations largely focused on expanding opportunities, enhancing capabilities, and providing second chances.

The Indian scenario demonstrates that one of the biggest challenges is to improve the progression possibilities of those who are currently engaged in vocational education and training or have experience in a vocational trade and have limited possibilities to

progress to technical education (polytechnics and colleges of engineering) and more generally to higher education. Presently, only 12 per cent of young people aged 18-24 is enrolled in higher education. National policies aim to enroll 30 per cent of Indian youth in higher education by 2020 (Indiainfoline, 2011).

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) considered the establishment of community colleges to serve as an important bridge between vocational education and training and higher education. Another purpose of a community college is to formalize skills through certification procedures.

Guidelines prepared by the University Grants Commission for community colleges include the recognition of prior skills and learning (UGC, 2012). Community colleges are alternative systems that aim to empower individuals through appropriate skills development, leading to qualifications in the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). Studying at a community college can lead to a two-year advanced diploma or an associate degree and hence the possibility to transfer to an undergraduate college for completion of a degree. Alternatively, it can lead to the students' direct entry into an occupation or trade with a certificate or diploma by completing the required number of credits. As an illustration, the following types of qualifications are awarded in community colleges at levels five and six of the NSQF:

VLE, an online environment of e-resources caters to several disciplines taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It is an initiative of Institute of Life-Long Learning, University of Delhi. Conceived in 2012, VLE today boasts state of art material that addresses emerging needs of a diverse student body, not only of Delhi University but other universities as well. Drawing from several successful Moodle models, the multi-media interactive contents loaded on VLE are categorized discipline-wise.

The lessons are developed by highly qualified faculty members across the universities and are



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continually edited and reviewed, primarily by discipline-expert Fellows employed to edit, oversee and coordinate the content that goes through several levels of rigorous peer reviewing and academic vetting to ensure quality and standardization. VLE also contains multimedia repository in form of audio, video and short films to expose students to new technologies in pedagogy.

Fine institutions like the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) are also committed to lifelong learning and through their Centre for Lifelong Learning offer a two-semester (part-time) Certificate programme in Social Work to adult learners who wish to engage in professional or voluntary social work activities. From the 2008 academic year, it also initiated a Diploma programme in Gerontology. The mission of the Centre is to work with all types of adult learners who, in turn, seek to work with the disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society. To this end, it conducts a range of outreach and short-term programmes for professionals, para-professionals and volunteers. The thematic contents of these programmes focus upon work-related needs as also self-growth and individual development. Apart from these open-enrolment programmes, the Centre also offers training courses in its regular calendar format in 'Training Volunteers for Social Work' and 'Basic Counseling Skills for the Helping Professions'.

The University of Mumbai also has a prominent IDOL section dealing with distance education where majority of students are adult learners, working youth, or married women who have missed the first chance of learning. This section is now introducing innovative methods of partnership with the University's teaching faculty not only for teaching and paper correction; but for framing syllabus to be in tune with the formal stream of education. What is innovative is the newly introduced Open Educational Resources -OER (www.mu.ac.in) that has started with an international tie-up with New Zealand Universities and the University of Mumbai to involve training of teachers to be ready for

imparting education to far-fetched learners in remote areas by creating easy and simple modules for training to be imparted in rural areas without transcending geographies. This enables all students across the University spread over its several campuses and affiliated Colleges gain from good teachers and updated technology via the distance learning mode.

6. Pilot Project and Concluding Remarks

In this section, we would like to draw attention to a micro level project started at a leading College under the aegis of the University of Mumbai's IDOL section in the arena of extension work to the community by young students and trained teachers. We are proud to be part of the 'Reach the Unreached' activity where a group of our 10 young students and me have undergone training and chosen the activity of formally providing degrees to our associates and peers who have left their education at grade 9 or 11 or other under-graduate levels by getting them officially enrolled at the University's distance education center. We provide them with educational sessions and soft skills in computers and mathematics; along with mentoring and hygiene sessions to develop them into holistic life-long learners. We also participate in extension competitions with other colleges to gain valuable insights into their modus operandi to imbibe best practices. This pioneer project is community based and has a direct impact and connectivity with all its stakeholders and 'win-win' situations are created as students earn 10 additional marks for 120 hours of extension work that also sensitizes them to the needs of the less fortunate by reaching the unreached and being a part of implementation as governments cannot reach every individual through public policy programmes in a nation of diverse and continuously rising demand for education that cannot be met by traditional channels and providers. This endeavour also makes us move towards the grand finale of our profession as we transit from being mere teachers to active researchers, and passionate extension workers thus, linking the taught, teachers, and the



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community. This is one of the ways of securing our common future through education that represents Goal 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>). It also represents an initiative in sync with India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 that is being partially implemented this year based on 5 Pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability.

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning represents an important part of NEP 2020 of the Government of India. The opportunity to attain foundational literacy, and pursue a livelihood is a basic right of every citizen. At the level of individuals, it unleashes personal freedoms and capabilities highlighted by Amartya Sen; while at the society and the national level, it represents developmental efforts.

A recommendation to incorporate Amartya Sen's Capability Approach when assessing higher education provides a broader, multi-criteria framework due to a focus on social justice as the metric for evaluating and shaping universities. Rajapakshe (2016) further explains that education needs to address not only the human capital needs of society, but also the development needs and aspirations of individuals as defined by the Capability Approach. It integrates social justice in the list of priorities and raises additional questions that go beyond the mainstream neoclassical boundary: how can universities contribute towards building a more just society, accounting human dignity, and wellbeing for all. One view highlights the neoclassical economic theory underlying the competitive higher education models in Anglo-Saxon countries, where the human capital theory prevails. Education is also subject to the overarching cost-benefit analysis methodology, a perspective that is too narrow and instrumental to capture the complex realities it needs to address. The second view elaborates on the theoretical and conceptual insight Sen's capability approach provides to capitalist economic models in general, and to

university education in particular. It considers education as a right, but also as intrinsically important in many other ways. Furthermore, this approach sees the instrumental role of education in ways that surpass the neoclassical view, emphasizing its transformative potential.

Unfortunately, non-literate members of a community suffer from disadvantages like the inability to carry out basic financial transactions; compare the quality/quantity of goods purchased against the price charged; fill out forms to apply for jobs, loans, services; comprehend public circulars and articles in the news media; use conventional and electronic mail to communicate and conduct business; make use of the internet and other technology to improve one's life and profession; comprehend directions and safety directives on the street, on medicines; help children with their education; be aware of one's basic rights and responsibilities as a citizen of India; appreciate works of literature; and pursue employment in medium or high-productivity sectors that require literacy. The abilities listed here are an illustrative list of outcomes to be achieved through adoption of innovative measures for Adult Education to provide second chances to people. Extensive field studies and analyses, both in India and across the world, clearly demonstrate that volunteerism and community involvement and mobilization are key success factors of adult literacy programmes, in conjunction with political will, organizational structure, proper planning, adequate financial support, and high-quality capacity building of educators and volunteers. Successful literacy programmes result not only in the growth of literacy among adults, but also result in increased demand for education for all children in the community, as well as greater community contribution to positive social change. The National Literacy Mission, when it was launched in 1988, was largely based on the voluntary involvement and support of the people, and resulted in significant increases in national literacy during the period of 1991–2011, including among women, that initiated dialogue and discussions on topical social issues. Strong and



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innovative government initiatives for adult education - in particular, to facilitate community involvement and the smooth and beneficial integration of technology - will be affected as soon as possible to expedite this all-important aim of achieving 100% literacy. First, an outstanding adult education curriculum framework will be developed by a new and well-supported constituent body of the NCERT that is dedicated to adult education to develop synergy with and build upon NCERT's existing expertise in establishing outstanding curricula for literacy, numeracy, basic education, vocational skills, and beyond. The curriculum framework for adult education will include at least five types of programmes, each with clearly defined outcomes: (a) foundational literacy and numeracy; (b) critical life skills (including financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, health care and awareness, child care and education, and family welfare); National Education Policy 2020 52 (c) vocational skills development (with a view towards obtaining local employment); (d) basic education (including preparatory, middle, and secondary stage equivalency); and (e) continuing education (including engaging holistic adult education courses in arts, sciences, technology, culture, sports, and recreation, as well as other topics of interest or use to local learners, such as more advanced material on critical life skills). The framework would keep in mind that adults in many cases will require rather different teaching-learning methods and materials than those designed for children.

Second, suitable infrastructure will be ensured so that all interested adults will have access to adult education and lifelong learning. A key initiative will be to use schools/ school complexes after school hours and on weekends and public library spaces for adult education courses which will be ICT-equipped when possible and for other community engagement and enrichment activities. The sharing of infrastructure for school, higher, adult, and vocational education, and for other community and volunteer activities, will be critical for ensuring

efficient use of both physical and human resources as well as for creating synergy among these five types of education and beyond. For these reasons, Adult Education Centers (AECs) could also be included within other public institutions such as HEIs, vocational training centers, and the like.

Third, the instructors/educators will be required to deliver the curriculum framework to mature learners for all five types of adult education as described in the Adult Education Curriculum Framework. These instructors will be trained by the National, State, and district level resource support institutions to organize and lead learning activities at Adult Education Centers, as well as coordinate with volunteer instructors. Qualified community members including from HEIs as part of each HEI's mission to engage with their local communities will be encouraged and welcomed to take a short training course and volunteer, as adult literacy instructors, or to serve as one-on-one volunteer tutors, and will be recognized for their critical service to the nation. States will also work with NGOs and other community organizations to enhance efforts towards literacy and adult education. The corporate sector can also plan their CSR initiatives around this area.

Fourth, all efforts will be undertaken to ensure the participation of community members in adult education. Social workers/ counsellors travelling through their communities to track and ensure participation of non-enrolled students and dropouts will also be requested, during their travels, to gather data of parents, adolescents, and others interested in adult education opportunities both as learners and as teachers/tutors. The social workers/counsellors will then connect them with local Adult Education Centres (AECs). Opportunities for adult education will also be widely publicized, through advertisements and announcements and through events and initiatives of NGOs and other local organizations.

Fifth, improving the availability and accessibility of books is essential to inculcating the habit of reading within our communities and educational institutions.



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This Policy recommends that all communities and educational will be strengthened and modernized to ensure an adequate supply of books that cater to the needs and interests of all students, including persons with disabilities and other differently-abled persons. The Central and State governments should take steps to ensure that books are made accessible and affordable to across the country including socio-economically disadvantaged areas as well as those living in rural and remote areas. Both public and private sector agencies/ institutions will devise strategies to improve the quality and attractiveness of books published in all Indian languages. Steps will be taken to enhance online accessibility of library books and further broad basing of digital libraries. For ensuring vibrant libraries in communities and educational institutions, it will be imperative to make available adequate library staff and devise appropriate career pathways and CPD for them. Other steps will include strengthening all existing libraries, setting up rural libraries and reading rooms in disadvantaged regions, making widely available reading material in Indian languages, opening children's libraries and mobile libraries, establishing social book clubs across India and across subjects, and fostering greater collaborations between education institutions and libraries.

Finally, technology will be leveraged to strengthen and even undertake the above initiatives. Quality technology-based options for adult learning such as apps, online courses/ modules, satellite-based TV channels, online books, and ICT-equipped libraries and Adult Education Centers through National Education Policy 2020 be developed, through government and philanthropic initiatives as well as through crowd sourcing and competitions. In many cases, quality adult education could thereby be conducted in an online or blended mode to accommodate the working population.

Online and digital education post-pandemic got a boost due to total or partial absence of on-campus classes, necessitating that we are ready with alternative modes of quality education whenever and

wherever traditional and in-person modes of education are not possible. In this regard, the National Education Policy 2020 of India recognizes the importance of leveraging the advantages of technology while acknowledging its potential risks and dangers. It calls for carefully designed and appropriately scaled pilot studies to determine how the benefits of online/digital education can be reaped while addressing or mitigating the downsides. In the meantime, the existing digital platforms and ongoing ICT-based educational initiatives must be optimized and expanded to meet the current and future challenges in providing quality education for all. However, the benefits of online/digital education cannot be leveraged unless the digital divide is eliminated through concerted efforts, such as the Digital India campaign and the availability of affordable computing devices. It is important that the use of technology for online and digital education adequately addresses concerns of equity. Teachers require suitable training and development to be effective online educators as they will have to learn, relearn, and unlearn. It cannot be assumed that a good teacher in a traditional classroom will automatically be a good teacher in an online classroom. Aside from changes required in pedagogy, online assessments also require a different approach. There are numerous challenges to conducting online examinations at scale, including limitations on the types of questions that can be asked in an online environment, handling network and power disruptions, and preventing unethical practices. Certain types of courses/subjects, such as performing arts and science practical have limitations in the online/digital education space, which can be overcome to a partial extent with innovative measures. Further, unless online education is blended with experiential and activity-based learning, it will tend to become a screen-based education with limited focus on the social, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of learning. Given the emergence of digital technologies and the emerging importance of leveraging technology for teaching-



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learning at all levels from school to higher education, this Policy recommends the following key initiatives: (a) Pilot studies for online education: Appropriate agencies, such as the NETF, CIET, NIOS, IGNOU, IITs, NITs, etc. will be identified to conduct a series of pilot studies, in parallel, to evaluate the benefits of integrating education with online education while mitigating the downsides and also to study related areas, such as, student device addiction, most preferred formats of e-content, etc. The results of these pilot studies will be publicly communicated and used for continuous improvement. (b) Digital infrastructure: There is a need to invest in creation of open, interoperable, evolvable, public digital infrastructure in the education sector that can be used by multiple platforms and point solutions, to solve for India's scale, diversity, complexity, and device penetration. This will ensure that the technology-based solutions do not become outdated with the rapid advances in technology. (c) Online teaching platform and tools: Appropriate existing e-learning platforms such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, will be extended to provide teachers with a structured, user-friendly, rich set of assistive tools for monitoring progress of learners. Tools, such as, two-way video and two-way-audio interface for holding online classes are a real necessity as the present pandemic has shown. (d) Content creation, digital repository, and dissemination: A digital repository of content including creation of coursework, Learning Games & Simulations, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality will be developed, with a clear public system for ratings by users on effectiveness and quality. For fun based learning student-appropriate tools like apps, gamification of Indian art and culture, in multiple languages, with clear operating instructions, will also be created. A reliable backup mechanism for disseminating e-content to students will be provided. (e) we need to address the digital divide given the fact that there persists a substantial section of the population whose digital access is highly limited, the existing mass media, such as

television, radio, and community radio will be extensively used for telecast and broadcasts. Such educational programmes were made available 24/7 in different languages to cater to the varying needs of the student population. A special focus on content in all Indian languages will be emphasized and required; digital content will need to reach the teachers and students in their medium of instruction as far as possible. (f) Virtual Labs: Existing e-learning platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and SWAYAMPRAKHA will also be leveraged for creating virtual labs so that all students have equal access to quality practical and hands-on experiment-based learning experiences. The possibility of providing adequate access to SEDG students and teachers through suitable digital devices, such as tablets with pre-loaded content, will be considered and developed. (g) Training and incentives for teachers: Teachers will undergo rigorous training in learner-centric pedagogy and on how to become high-quality online content creators themselves using online teaching platforms and tools. There will be emphasis on the teacher's role in facilitating active student engagement with the content and with each other. (h) Online assessment and examinations: Appropriate bodies, such as the proposed National Assessment Centre or PARAKH, School Boards, NTA, and other identified bodies will design and implement assessment frameworks encompassing design of competencies, portfolio, rubrics, standardized assessments, and assessment analytics. Studies will be undertaken to pilot new ways of assessment using education technologies focusing on 21st century skills. (i) Blended models of learning: While promoting digital learning and education, the importance of face-to-face in-person learning is fully recognized. Accordingly, different effective models of blended learning will be identified for appropriate replication for different subjects. (j) Laying down standards: As research on online/digital education emerges, NETF and other appropriate bodies shall set up standards of content, technology, and pedagogy for online/digital teaching-learning. These



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standards will help to formulate guidelines for e-learning by States, Boards, schools, and school complexes, HEIs, etc. Creating a Dedicated Unit for Building of World Class, Digital Infrastructure, Educational Digital Content and Capacity Technology in education is a journey and not a destination and capacity will be needed to orchestrate the various ecosystem players to implement policy objectives. A dedicated unit for the purpose of orchestrating the building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building was created in the Ministry to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education. Since technology is rapidly evolving, and needs specialists to deliver high quality e-learning, a vibrant ecosystem needs to be encouraged to create solutions that not only solve India's challenges of scale, diversity, equity, but also evolve in keeping with the rapid changes in technology, whose half-life reduces with each passing year. Thus, the new knowledge network will consist of experts drawn from the field of administration, education, educational technology, digital pedagogy and assessment, e-governance (<https://www.education.gov.in/NEP>).

Our pilot study of a leading College post-pandemic over 3 years covering nine thousand students and fifty associate staff reiterated the importance of online, blended, and lifelong learning that has moved beyond the traditional curriculum towards multi-disciplinary areas of teaching, learning, and research revisiting ancient Indian history, knowledge systems, economics (Arthashastra written by Kautilya in ancient times is being studied), yoga, classical music, and dance; along with new AI driven syllabi, and technology-incorporated learning patterns. Soft skills, mathematical skills, communication, and value-based education for our learners is growing in importance and coverage for a holistic and just society; as well as an equitable economy, and ethical polity.

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In fine, we are no longer blindly aping the West as 'one-size does not fit all' as experienced from the aftermath of Neo-liberal reforms; thereby finding glocal solutions to our modern problems. The way forward is the Asian perspective that is more balanced and people and planet oriented for all-round development.

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