

Lifelong Learning: A Solution to the Present Challenges

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Lifelong Learning from ‘cradle to grave’ is a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education, based on inclusive, emancipatory, humanistic and democratic values, it is all encompassing and integral to the vision of a knowledge based society. Lifelong Learning is the ‘lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated’ pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. The term recognizes that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom but takes place throughout life and in a range of different work situations. It is an indispensable tool to enable education to face its multiple current and emerging challenges. Learning can be seen as something that takes place on an on-going basis from our daily interaction with others and with the world around us. It occurs through experiences encountered in the course of a lifetime. These experiences could be obtained formally, informally and non-formally. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development but also ensures competitiveness and better employability.

The lifelong dimension is relatively non-problematic, as it envisages and emphasises continuous development of intellect, capability and integrity to withstand challenges and ready to face in dynamic environment. It is widely accepted that as knowledge and skills become obsolete, individuals continuously upgrade their competencies in a process of perpetual learning. Even those who have had most sophisticated and advanced knowledge must continue their learning journey of perfecting their capabilities not only for their individual development but because the demand for overall social, cultural, economic development requires the maximum potential of every individual. It is recognised as a solution for the growing problem of workplace skill set deficiency caused by technological evolution. As the pace of change continues to accelerate, workers can no longer rely on their existing skill sets for socio-economic security. To reduce the risk of economic displacement, workers must become proactive in managing their skill sets to acquire new skills to meet the changing needs of their employers.

The scope of Lifelong Learning is quite broad and covers the whole spectrum of formal, informal and non-formal learning settings. Lifelong

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learners acquire knowledge and then utilize knowledge resources to generate wealth and welfare. In post work time, person share their wisdom and experiences with the younger generations. Here also informal learning takes place to absorb the knowledge from experienced persons and use the same knowledge in generating wealth welfare of the society. This is a continuous cycle of knowledge creation, dissemination and utilization. Learning is therefore part of life which takes place at all times and in all places. We are entering a world where no one knows what the tomorrow will bring. So we must always equip ourselves fully to shape our living desirably. There is no sector of life where effort to learn in that sector is not possible.

Why Lifelong Learning?

Lifelong Learning includes learning for personal purposes such as personal fulfilment and adaptability, social purposes such as social inclusion, civic purposes such as active citizenship and employment related purposes such as employment. It can enhance the capabilities of a nation for optimum utilization of knowledge resources. It can also make creation and generation of new knowledge a reality. To derive maximum benefits from intellectual assets, to enhance the productivity in different social sectors and to make public functionaries more accountable and transparent, coherent knowledge dissemination to the society are the needs of the hour where lifelong learner have much more to contribute. Lifelong Learning is one of the most effective ways to deal with change and change is constant - change in our personal lives, change in our working lives and change in our local communities, governance, associations and organizations. The change in the i-phone alone has required constant learning and re-learning by customers. How much more important is learning that is geared towards serious enrichment or career-upward pursuits? One of the most influential management writers, Peter Drucker, wrote: “We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change the most pressing task is to teach people ‘how to learn.’ We offer or facilitate the offering of Lifelong Learning in a wide variety of formats – online, hybrid, face to face – in asynchronous and synchronous delivery modes, for credit leading to a degree or non-credit leading to a certificate, on one of the main campuses or at one of our regionally distributed higher education centres. We develop educational media to make learning more engaging. We assist in course development and we coach instructors in the most effective pedagogy to keep learning interactive and interesting”.

We are committed to the support of Lifelong Learning in all its formats for audiences of all ages because of the many benefits that accrue to

the individual and our communities. The understanding that a key goal of modern society is the availability and accessibility of learning opportunities for all people throughout their lives is predicated on the belief that everyone is capable and can be motivated to learn in complex environment. It is imperative to encourage such motivation throughout peoples' life span for perennial transformation of working life. Since quantum of knowledge is fast increasing beyond imagination and as a consequence, the thrust of education has shifted from traditional outlook to practical oriented for productivity and development.

The main focus of Lifelong Learning is to integrate learning, living and working in the contexts across family, community settings, workplaces, and clubs etc. to cope up effectively with the dynamics of increasing challenges. Lifelong learners are happier, healthier and live longer. Those who continue with formal education have a significant financial advantage over the course of a lifetime. And a well-educated citizenry makes for a better society for all of us. Why Lifelong Learning? Simply stated, because, it is good for health and good for everyone around you, in order to excel and develop in the world of work and challenging competitive and learning throughout becomes obligatory upon all of us to deliver in different spheres of life comprehensively and meaningfully. There is every need to reform education in the light of expectations of different stakeholders when the technology is rapidly influencing every aspect of our life, business and society and education cannot keep itself away from these changes. It must acknowledge these changes and develop suitable methods benefiting the requirements of different stakeholders within the framework of Lifelong Learning.

Objectives of Lifelong Learning

- To accredit institutions for developing effective learner support system to facilitate learning, learning up to pre-degree level;
- To provide professional advice to the Government of India, and to the States, regarding proper development of Open and Distance Learning system at school level in response to requests from the concerned Government;
- To develop need based Academic and Vocational Education Programmes for livelihood and Lifelong Learning up to pre- degree level;
- To strengthen the Open and Distance Learning system through Research and Development activities;
- To attain excellence in developing quality Open and Distance Learning curricula and courseware for learners;

- To promote open schooling at national and global level by networking, capacity building, sharing of resources and quality assurance;
- To make higher education institutions more adult learner friendly and
- Developing meaningful and sustained relationship between higher education and society.

Functions of Lifelong Learning

- To take steps for developing strategy plans for promoting and up scaling the Open Schooling programme in India;
- To develop needed action plan for making education equitable and inclusive for the marginalized and disadvantaged groups like girl/women, minorities, differently-abled (physically and mentally challenged) etc;
- To provide technical and financial support to State Governments in India for setting up and up scaling of State Open Schools;
- To provide effective student support services for facilitating learners by establishing study centres in agencies, organizations and institutions in India and abroad;
- To offer a wide spectrum of courses of study in general, vocational and continuing education and life enrichment courses up to pre-degree level;
- To develop multi-media and multi-channel delivery modes for effective transaction of courseware to support courses and programmes;
- To conduct examinations and issue certificates to successful learners;
- To promote quality of learning in ODL through Monitoring, Supervision and Evaluation, maintaining equivalence of standards with the formal education system, while retaining its own distinct character;
- To provide professional/technical consultation in field of ODL to institutions/organizations/agencies in India and abroad;
- To act as Resource Organization and Capacity Building Centre in open schooling at national as well as international level;
- To collaborate with national and international organizations for promotion of Open Schooling;
- To partner with Government schemes and programmes at school sector for achieving the national goals and objectives;
- To meet the knowledge challenges of 21st century and increase India's competitive advantage in the fields of knowledge and
- To promote wide spread of knowledge to maximise public benefit.

Importance of Lifelong Learning with special reference to various commissions and policies

The importance and relevance of Lifelong Learning has been repeatedly focused in several educational policy documents and discourses in India. These documents considered innovated strategic of Lifelong Learning as an important and effective aspect of education in the development of national self-confidence. While the Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) observed that education does not end with schooling but is a lifelong process; the National Policy on Education in India 1986 (modified in 1992) considered lifelong education as the cherished goal of the educational process which presupposes universal literacy, provision of opportunities for youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice at the pace suited to them. It observes that the critical development issue is the continuous up-gradation of skills so as to produce manpower resources of the kind and the number required by the society. Although these policies were translated into practice and a number of Lifelong Learning programs were implemented by governmental, nongovernmental organizations and universities in the country during the last three decades, the bulk of the programs continued to focus on adult literacy and continuing education mainly due to the massive number of non-literates and neo literates as estimated by the National Literacy Mission (NLM-Literacy Facts at A Glance, 2007).

With the formulation of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007- 20012), the Government of India put forward the idea of expanding the scope of the Continuing Education Program by developing it as Lifelong Education and Awareness Program (LEAP). This may be partly influenced by the global discourse on Lifelong Learning and partly due to the socio economic changes taking place within and outside the country. The role and importance of Lifelong Learning has increased in recent times due to several socio-economic factors. In a technology driven knowledge based competitive economy; the landscape of learning is fast changing in India. The growth of Indian economy at an average rate of 9.2% per annum during 2006-7 (Economic Survey-2006-2007), tremendous expansion of Information& Communication Technology and the rapid globalization have all been instrumental in bringing about changes in the job skills so that the workforce keeps on learning and updating their skills to be globally competitive.

The country's economic performance depends mainly on access to and the adoption of new technology and improving the skills of the labour force. Since 92.4% of India's workforce is in the unorganized sectors (National Sample Survey, 61st Round, 2004-5), they need regular upgrading of skills to

compete in the globalized economy. Equipping the labour force with relevant skills imply the need for creating a variety of learning and training opportunities to foster the economic and labour market oriented perspective and work related mobility.

Lifelong Learning is considered as an intervention tool for socio-economic empowerment in a globalizing world to stay ahead in a competitive world with knowledge superiority. Lifelong Learning is especially important in the context of changing global economy where knowledge based economy supersedes other forms of economy such as agrarian economy and industrial economy, in terms of economic power of the nation and socio-economic empowerment of citizens.

The country is poised at a moment in history when a much brighter future for its entire people is within its reach. Skill development will help to actualise this potential. Skills and knowledge are the driving forces for socio-economic development. "Potentially the target group for skill development comprises all those in the labour force including those entering the labour market for the first time (12.8 million annually), those employed in the organised sector (26.0million) and those working in the unorganised sector (433 million) in 2004-05. The current capacity of the skill development programme is 3.1 million India has set a target of skilling 500 million people by 2022". A majority of workers in the unorganized sectors have not received any formal skills training. The skill transfer by and large has essentially taken place through traditional mechanism of receiving training from persons who can be called master craftsmen or persons with some experience in the particular skill sector within the family, community and outside the formal structures. This leaves the sector highly vulnerable and makes the situation of the people involved in informal/ unorganised sector pauperising. However, to build excellence in the Lifelong Learning to meet the challenges and to increase India's competitiveness advantage in the fields of education and training, the cardinality of knowledge based economy which primarily relies on promotion of ideas and understanding cannot be underestimated.

Lifelong Learning is no longer just as aspect of knowledge and training, it must become the guiding principle for the people and the community as a whole to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity to participate fully in developmental initiative, to improve the quality and standard in their lives, to continue learning and to adapt it to changing ways and new situations with flexibility.

India at present is recognised significantly as one of the youngest nations in the world with biggest strength of over 50% of the population under the age of 30 years. It is estimated that by about 2025, India will have 25% of

the World's total workforce. In order to harness the full demographic dividend India needs an educational system which is of high quality, accessible, affordable, flexible, adaptable and relevant to the individuals' economy and to the society as a whole and becomes a key for the success in an increasingly globalised world. The Indian education system has been churning out brilliant minds but are lacking in skill sets required for specific jobs. There is huge gap between the talent that is coming out of colleges and universities and its suitability in terms of scope and standard of employable skills. The need is for appropriate and adequate skill development and training which can convert this force into the largest source of technically skilled manpower. The skill India mission launched by the Government aims to provide a solution to this problem through creation of a job competent and skilled workforce by equipping it with employable skills and link them with demand centres. However, the challenges ahead for offering job relevant trainings to the abundance of young productive minds but unemployed and underemployed (with qualifications but are not work ready) falls within the sphere of vocational character of Lifelong Learning. It is imperative to nurture intellectual capabilities and enhancing professional/vocational skills of youth through a systematic approach to Lifelong Learning to derive maximum benefit. The changing requirement of knowledge economy, fast increasing capabilities of existing system, innovative technology necessitates the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to maintain high quality of productivity and efficiency for procreation and development of effective professional societies to harness inclusive development. It would accord maximum priority to Lifelong Learning with a view to meet the demands of emerging knowledge society and facilitate the process of learning society. Lifelong Learning is considered as a necessity of the citizens of the nation in order to make India an active global player.

Importance of Educator in Lifelong Learning

1. Educators are guides to sources of knowledge and serve as facilitators for the student's acquisition of knowledge;
2. People learn in groups through interaction and dialogue and from each other and people learn by doing, or Action Learning;
3. Assessment is used to guide learning strategies and to identify pathways for future learning and educators should develop individualized learning plans;
4. Educators are lifelong learners. Initial training and on-going professional development are linked and people have access to learning opportunities over a lifetime and

5. Learning is put into practice and learners reflect upon learning and analyse their personal development.

Environment in Support of Lifelong Learning

Requirements:

The global perspective leads to the following requirements for Lifelong Learning:

1. Users set most of the goals, not the system and the vocabulary, tools, functions, and practices supported by the system come from the working environment, where they are natural and appropriate;
2. The mode of operation emphasizes learning from breakdowns and from fulfilling commitments;
3. Tools must appear directly relevant to help the problem at hand; they must not generate further breakdowns and although learning environments may have some built-in expertise, users will find most expert knowledge by locating other people who have the knowledge;
4. Problems that have been solved elsewhere and reporting on their solutions;
5. The systems should aid users in two kinds of reflection in immediate, to deal with the problem and to organize a solution; and post-mortem, to see if the problem is recurrent and can be avoided by restructuring work processes and
6. Systems should support not only the individual's sole performance, but work in cooperation with others and while belonging to different groups at the same time: systems should support the improvement of collective knowledge as well as individual knowledge.

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