

Need for Digital Learning in Rural Areas: Special reference to Higher Education

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 15 September 2020

Keywords

Digital learning, Rural Women, Quality Education, Digital Divide..

ABSTRACT

Higher Education refers to the third stage of education which is mainly provided by college and university. In present times the process of higher education has added another dimension to it by using the medium of digital technology, which is helping to ensure access to higher education for all the people without the need of any physical framework beyond distance and time.

Contemporary society is a society of digital revolution; the entire world is going through a process of digitization. In this digital era, the usefulness of digital teaching becomes manifolds and increases the chance to enhance the educational quality. Even today the condition of education in rural India is in a critical stage and condition of higher education is even more critical. According to the census of 2011, literacy rate of India is 74.04 percent while the enrollment rate in higher education is merely 26.3 percent. Many challenges which rural India is facing with regards to access of higher education can be tackled through use of digital learning facilities. Use of digital platforms and tools can also help in ensuring and enhancing the quality of the educational content that is being provided. Use of digital technology can also be useful in addressing the educational challenges of rural areas like lack of infrastructure, problems of funding, social taboos and the lack of awareness, educational institutes are often situated so far from the villages that it becomes difficult specially for the female learners to gain benefits of higher learning. In perspective of digital learning marshal McLuhan's statement is notable, he says that "we shape our tools and afterwards tools shape us" digital learning can ensure universal access to learning opportunities and global access to education for all. This paper is based on secondary data and the main objective of this paper is to explore the need of digital technology in the field of education in rural areas, this paper will also attempt to analyze the status of higher education in perspective of digital learning.

1. Objective

1. To find out need and importance of digital learning in rural areas.
2. To find out structural challenges and obstacle in the path of digital learning for rural people.
3. To determine the importance of higher education for rural people.

2. Introduction

About 66% of India's population lives in villages. India is considered a country of villages so whenever we talk about any change or development, its path would go through the village. The villages of India determine the future of India. Jawaharlal Nehru has stated the importance of rural education and also felt that education of rural women makes family planning and other rural development schemes successful. Gandhi ji considered rural development as the real development of the nation. In the present scenario, there have been very positive changes in the rural sector, in which technology has a huge contribution. Whether it is about social change or political, economic, educational and cultural, technology has influenced all these areas. The government is ensuring the process of rural development through various scheme and policies .in this context, the digital initiative in the economic and educational sector can be seen clearly. Like various schemes launched in the education sector, Swayam,epathShala, egyptankosh, digital

library, Swayamprabha etc. Through the educational platforms efforts have been made to improve rural education quality and enrollment rate. But the question is whether the rural education scenario can be improved only by building digital learning platform? No, it is not so. Until these educational platforms are brought to the last person of the country easily, affordably and within their reach, the situation will remain very challenging. There are several barriers and challenges in providing digital teaching to the rural population like lack of digital equipments such as mobile, computers, laptops etc. Another crucial challenge is the lack of awareness about using and operating the digital educational tools. There is a possibility of tackling the challenges of rural education through a variety of digital tools and platforms which in turn will also reduce structural challenges of the rural educational framework and the aspect of quality education can also improve to a great extent. Digital education can be helpful in overcoming some of the important hurdles that are commonly present in rural areas like time-space and shortage of teachers. Implementing digital education to rural India remains challenging among all these obstacles but there is no doubt that it is an excellent medium and idea through which it is possible to educate the whole of rural India at a very fast pace and their educational field will help ensure attendance and representation. Therefore, there is a great need to put more emphasis on digital learning in the rural education system. In this context, if we take the example of

other countries like USA, the Massachusetts University provides the university courses online with the help of open courseware (OCW) and ensures its reach globally which also reaches to the common people.

The world is becoming digital and it is the need of time to redefine rural education through the era of information and communication technology. This digital definition of education will strengthen the rural education system. Appropriate use of technology can help reduce a lot of problems through digital education planning. With the help of public private partnership rural areas can have access to learning through various multimedia learning tools, video lectures with smart boards and flipped classroom, mobile learning service. Through interactive digital media tools school with one teacher can deliver remote lectures in many places. This will also help to overcome the shortage of teachers in these schools. The digital learning related processes are made available online through LMS (Learning Management Tools). It is a software application that helps in presenting the teaching material in digital form. Here one thing is noteworthy that whenever digitalization is done in a society the digital divide also grows there. Equal distribution of digital tools and platforms is necessary to prevent this inequality.

During using technology, there may be initial challenges of connecting in rural areas with its use and exposing them to digital devices. Therefore, before implementation, proper care should be taken to train tutor. Interactive learning through digitization can make learning in classroom interesting, engaging and more friendly which in turn can reduce drop-out rates. The digital classroom can actually help in the upliftment of rural education in India by providing students access to resources and knowledge that would not have been possible otherwise. Access to education in rural areas is important to eradicate poverty in India and its important role in the development of the country's economy cannot be ignored.

Present scenario of rural education

The condition of rural schools and colleges in India is very pathetic as there is neither enough teacher nor infrastructure. There is a lack of access to quality education despite various educational schemes and policies. Although the enrollment rates are high in school and colleges, the rural students are scarce and the female rural students face double challenges. They are under pressure from economic, social and security perspective; with these constraints it becomes even more challenging to get education. According to survey of Statista the number of internet users in India was 483 million in 2018. And the latest report by the internet & mobile association of India (IAMAI) and Nielsen revealed that there were 227 million active internet users in rural areas, as of November 2019 compared with about 205 million in cities. According to 2017-18 national sample survey report on education, only 24% of Indian households have an internet facility and about 15% of rural households have access to internet service. For urban households, the proportion is 42 %. It is clear from these surveys that the inclination of people of the country is moving rapidly towards internet and information and communication technology (ICT). The above data shows that the number of internet users in rural areas is increasingly large but still it has not been able to use them successfully in the field of education. Another important notable point here is the Gap in

development and lack of support of basic infrastructure such as electricity, potable water, health and sanitation, security of girl's students etc which pose as major obstacle in improving the status of education in rural sector. The lack of internet connectivity prevents the educational environment from expanding in the rural area. Many of these areas are often troubled by natural, political, and social disturbances that make it even more difficult to establish a sustainable and equitable educational environment. Keeping such limitations in mind, it has become necessary to implement new digital education tools in rural India. Apart from the government, many organizations working in this direction are coming forward to find many ways and means to raise the standards of education in the rural India. Rural India has a deep and intense desire and aspiration to succeed, but the only actual support which is needed is the effective implementation of programs and policy on the ground and a large-scale development framework to protect the right to education and deliver it till the last person of the country.

3. Important Digital Learning Platform In Current Scenario

1. Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Mind (SWAYAM) is an Indian massive open online course (MOOC) platform. This platform offers free access to everyone and hosts course from 9th standard till post-graduation. This platform is committed to providing quality education to the needy people from city to village. It is divided into four parts which are E-tutorial, E-content, discussion forum and Assessment. Through the first phase e-tutorials the teacher prepares the educational material for the student through teaching videos, power point presentations, animation etc. and in the second phase various quality educational materials such as e-books, open sources content, reference link and further reading suggestion is included. The third stage is very interactive in which students can discuss and get advice from subject related experts and finally the fourth stage is the evaluation phase in which the students are evaluated through e quiz, MCQs, and frequently asked questions (FAQs).
2. SWAYAMPRAKASHA--This platform facilitates 32 high quality channels through DTH (direct to home). Educational material is being provided through UGC, IGNOU, NCERT, IIT, CCNPTEL institute under Swayamprabha. This platform is particularly beneficial in providing access to quality education for people living in rural areas where the internet connectivity is poor. This platform encourages distance education.
3. IGNOU—Ignou is one of the best medium of learning which was created for distance learning purpose. Its teaching material has student oriented content and can be easily understood without the help of teacher. This platform has proved to be a boon for rural learning. It has helped in reducing the structural challenges of learning in rural areas.

NDL (National Digital Library)- It is a platform for providing digital learning content with about 1.70 crore books, thesis,

journals etc. The students who live in remote areas are also able to get educational material through NDL as per their requirement. This platform can be accessed from anywhere anytime.

It is a very paradoxical situation that while on one hand we are moving towards digitization of education on the other hand the digital divide in rural areas is also increasing. This tradition of inequality and developmental divide can be seen in rural areas since a very long time. But the digital divide can be removed only by rural education and digitalization of the people. The digital divide can be eradicated by providing various technical facilities in this direction such as technical skills education and awareness for rural people. And technical infrastructure initiatives such as providing mobile, laptop, computer, electricity and net facilities for rural poor people. The situation of electricity in the rural areas is still very pathetic. According to a survey of villages conducted by the ministry of rural development in 2017-18 under Antyodaya mission, showed that 16% of India's households received one to eight hours of electricity daily, 33% received nine to twelve hours and only 47% received more than twelve hours a day. These surveys reveal the real and key barriers of rural digital learning which is very critical. Therefore, along with digitization, strengthening of the basic infrastructure in rural areas is also needed to facilitate digital education.

4. Discussion

Digital learning can revive the rural higher education system and provide quality higher education to the people at a lower cost. Digitization has become the need of the 21st century because not being digital means that the person is not using their full potential and is being deprived of opportunities. Digital education is also trying to bridge the gap between education and employment. As the number of internet users has increased in the villages today it can be said that the future of country will go through the digital revolution. The objective of digital learning can be met by removing rural structural barriers. And providing them quality, accessibility, and affordability of education and also ensuring electricity and net connectivity in rural areas. Through the collective efforts of the government

and civil society these objectives can be achieved. The government of India has already taken steps in this direction through the digital initiative and is working towards the transformation of rural education.

5. Conclusion

Higher education has a huge impact on the country's economy. These two are interlinked to such an extent that higher education in developed countries contributes significantly to the GDP of those countries. Qualitative education leads to strengthening economy of the country. The condition of India's rural higher education system is far from satisfactory. The gross enrollment rate in higher education here is 26.3 %, which is much lower than America (85.8%) and China (48.1%) and the situation of higher education in rural area is even more critical which is proving to be a hindrance in the growth of economy and development of our country. Focusing on Rural India's education is important because when the condition of education of a large part (Rural India) of the country is critical its effect is also seen on the development of the country. Therefore, we must ensure the accessibility of all by making digital education a quality measure through digital facilities in the global era, and make the education system equitable. Based on the analysis of various data and facts the conclusion of this paper is that the rural education system needs to be strengthened and reformed both in the traditional and digital way. First of all, by removing rural structural challenges rural people will have to be drawn towards higher education system. For the rural population the emphasis should be on making higher education available in the local language and by making them aware of the digital learning and teaching skills they can be made technique friendly which can make digital learning more accessible. In this digital era if we try to improve the rural education system without digital facilities then a large part of the country will be deprived of higher education and it will increase the gap in higher education, so digital learning is the need of time.

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