

Lifelong learning – learning to learn

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Key Words

Learning Skills, Technology, University, Teaching

Abstract

Lifelong Learning has been considered as an important milestone of learning society and recognized as an important programme of the Government of India. The country's economic performance depends critically on access to and the adoption of new technology and improving the skills of the labour force. Open and distance learning (ODL) is playing a vital role in lifelong learning. Effective teaching is vital to give the desired outcomes. Use of tools like internet, Television, mobile phones, print and broadcast media will ensure coverage of the large populace in a vast nation like India.

Introduction

Lifelong learning (LL) is defined as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective”(1). Although the term is widely used in a variety of contexts its meaning is often unclear. A learning approach that can be used to define lifelong learning is heutagogy. In education, **heutagogy**, is a term coined by Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon(2) and is also called self-determined learning. The basic tenet of the approach is that it is the learner who should be at the centre of their own learning, and hence that 'learning' should not be seen as teacher-centric or curriculum-centric, but learner-centric. Since the theory was first launched in 2000 it has become accepted as a practical proposition with its approach being particularly suitable in e-learning environments. Recent (post-2010) research into brain plasticity indicates that the approach can be useful in increasing learning capability. (3). LL is often considered as a learning that occurs after the formal education years of childhood (where learning is instructor driven - pedagogical) and into adulthood (where the learning is individually driven - andragogical). It is sought out naturally through life experiences as the learner seeks to gain knowledge for professional or personal reasons.

The concept of lifelong learning has become of vital importance with the emergence of new technologies that change how we receive and gather information, collaborate with others, and communicate. Constant change is emerging as the new normal. In order to survive and thrive, organizations and individuals must be able to adjust, and enhance their knowledge and skills to meet evolving needs. This means the most important thing someone can learn is how to learn (4). The need for lifelong learning and the demands from the learners as well as trainers, in the Indian scenario is explored in this work.

Background

In recent years 'lifelong learning' has been adopted in the UK as an umbrella term for post-compulsory education that falls outside of the UK Higher Education system - Further Education, Community Education, Work-based Learning and similar voluntary, public sector and commercial settings. Most colleges and universities in the United States encourage lifelong learning to non-traditional students. Professional licensure and certification courses are also

offered at many universities, for instance for teachers, social services providers, and other professionals.

Open and distance learning (ODL) is playing a vital role in lifelong learning. Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is a great example of that. BOU has 6 schools and is offering 23 formal and 19 non formal programs and students' number is 378,382 (according to 2010-11 enrolment numbers). Most of the courses of BOU are for Professional development and most of the students are professional people who are getting scope to study in flexible hours. In place of campus based teaching, this university uses technology including electronic devices to reach people in different corners of the country. The learner in this system is not restricted by time, space or age. A learner can think and learn at his own will, at his own place and at any time whenever he/she feels free to learn.

In Canada, the federal government's Lifelong Learning Plan allows Canadian residents to withdraw funds from their Registered Retirement Savings Plan to help pay for lifelong learning at designated educational institutions.

In India, 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.

The role and importance of Lifelong Learning in India have 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 2006-7*), 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 critically 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, 61stRound, 2004-5*), they need regular upgrading of skills to compete in the globalize economy.

Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector

The role of a teacher in the lifelong learning sector is extremely diverse; you may be called a lecturer, a tutor, a trainer, an instructor, an assessor, a work-based learning or an apprentice supervisor, a learning manager or a prison education officer. Professional teachers in the lifelong learning sector also share in the common purpose of serving the needs of learners, employers and the community. They face the challenges of working in a context which is diverse and rapidly changing.

A new framework of teacher qualifications for the Learning and Skills sector was introduced in England in September 2007. From then, all teachers, trainers and tutors offered jobs in colleges and other publicly funded organizations would need to have an appropriate teaching qualification.

A lot of time is spent in activities that are not directly concerned with imparting knowledge or skills. The role of a teacher has many sub-roles and equally does other roles in the lifelong learning sector. It is imperative to widen participation in education and training, to promote social inclusion and to increase prosperity. The Departments have to play a major role in the

development of the human resources specially providing professional manpower in the area of Lifelong Learning. At present, there are 86 Departments/Centers of LL in the country. Each university has its unique character, ethos and local needs. Over the years the faculty of the DLL may have developed certain expertise which if encouraged may lead to specialization.

In the Indian locale, The colleges are expected to undertake the following activities: Involve students in the spread of Literacy, impart soft skills including Computer Literacy and English speaking skills to students and organise Lifelong Learning Programmes in consultation with the *Jan Shikshan Sansthan* or the University Department of LL. The UGC Guidelines published during the XI Plan specified five selected areas of intervention in the University-system via: Teaching, Training and Research, Lifelong Learning/Continuing Education, Extension including student Counseling & Career-Guidance, Material Development, Population Education.

Proficiencies of Teachers

1. Knowledge: Teachers must be able to demonstrate the ability to apply content, pedagogical competencies and critical thinking in educational settings. Teachers additionally must possess knowledge about the materials available for the teaching of their subject matter.
 1. a.) Communication: Knowledge and use of effective communication skills are at the heart of effective teaching. An educator must be able to demonstrate appropriate written and verbal communication skills including articulation, expressive language, voice quality, usage, and grammar. A teacher must also be aware of the messages relayed via nonverbal communication. The teacher, herself as a lifelong learner is continually refining communication skills with students, parents, and colleagues.
 1. b.) Critical Thinking: The teacher must be able to model and teach the process of critical thinking and inspire students to be responsible citizens who contribute to society.
2. Skills:
 2. a) Interpersonal Skills: The teacher also must possess interpersonal skills that foster peer collaboration.
 2. b) Integration of Discipline: Knowing content is important for a teacher; however, broadening the context and applicability of content through integration of disciplines must be practiced.
 2. c) Technology Integration: Integrating technology into classroom instruction means more than teaching basic computer skills and software programs in a separate computer class. Rather, technology should be used to engage students and facilitate their thinking and construction of knowledge.
- II.4. Organization and Classroom Management: The teacher adopts a proactive organizational and managerial style that involves interventions and strategies designed to include positive expectations, self-evaluation, and growth.
3. Behavior
 - 3.a) Scholarly Inquiry : Teachers must have the ability to be collaborative and conduct and use action research within his or her own academic disciplines.
 3. b) Reflective Wisdom: Teachers must be engaged in the process of continuous learning themselves.
 3. c) Cultural Awareness and Acceptance: The teacher must provide for educational opportunities that will strengthen students' appreciation of the diversity that enriches our nation.

The teaching methodologies could include: Projects, Field work in respect of a subject of study, Participation in literacy, post-literacy, continuing education, population education and

non-formal education programs, Participation in programs for enhancing employability and technology skills.

The need of the hour is to focus on possibilities of using key ODL technologies -Print medium, Radio, Television, Mobile Telephony, and Internet and Computer networks for promoting lifelong learning in India.

Conclusion

The demographic data shows that about 50% of Indian population is below the age of 25 (*Census Report, 2001*). The gross enrolment ratio in higher education is only 10%. The universities have an important role in equipping the student and nonstudent youth to adopt to changes and learn new skills in accordance with the new demands of work. In other words, the university system has to prepare the student to be a lifelong learner. Only then will the youth be able to sustain his/her knowledge and skills at an international benchmark level. While most of the universities have already established separate Departments of LL for institutionalizing extension and for meeting the current demands of Lifelong Learning in their respective areas of operation, the remaining universities need to give top priority to this field.

While it may be desirable for the University Departments of Lifelong Learning to collaborate with Government Departments and NGOs, they should not become merely implementing agencies of the readymade programmes but strive to link theory to practice and vice versa and focus on generating knowledge.

Further, the improvements in the quality of life have led to enhancement of the life span of elderly population. The Department of Lifelong Learning will have to design specific programmes for the senior citizens with the aim of enriching their life.

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