



Technology driven Higher Education, Paradigm shift and the Crisis

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Abstract:

Globalization, internet technology revolutions and the ways and means in which the higher education system was, guided mediated and controlled by the online teaching platforms and courses, forcefully projects the paradigm shift from technology assisted, blended learning to technology driven (blended) learning. The pragmatic goals of higher education which epitomizes knowledge creation and dissemination for acquisition of employable skills in the market economy has become the predominant objective of this new paradigm, pushing humanistic goals of Higher education to a distant past. This shift was already reflected in the neoliberal restructuring of Higher education systems according to the liberalization, and privatization policies in last two decades. This paradigm places immediate economical benefit oriented learning as the ultimate goal of Higher Education. The paper tries to understand the crisis faced by humanistic goals of higher education and the discourses on quality of education under this new paradigm, technology driven education.

Key words:

Higher education system, paradigm shift, technology driven- learning, blended learning

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Higher education system of any nation shares a dynamic relationship with its social, economical and cultural conditions. The changes in any of these areas directly or indirectly influence the philosophy and outlook of higher education and are reflected in the higher education policies from time to time. This dynamic relationship between Higher education and social change is generally taken for granted and in common parlance it is argued that the education is the panacea for all social evils. In a closer look, education has a direct and dynamic influence in two spheres, socio-economic aspects of the individual and socio-economic aspects of the society at large. Therefore modern states are very active and keen to develop educational policies that helps them to steer towards a desired future. That leads to an understanding that good education policies can bring positive changes in society, and bad

education policies can bring negative changes in the society. Often it is not the bad policies themselves but also the bad implementation of the good policies too impact negatively. Therefore regards to higher education, it is very essential that right policies are made and implemented with right efforts and intentions. The impact of higher education on the socio-economic conditions of the individual and that of the society at large is discussed in different disciplines with varying aspects. Public good, private good debate, knowledge economy and knowledge society discourse, pragmatic objectives and humanistic objectives of education discourse are some of them. All those discourses, underlines the dual aspects of education, individual and society.

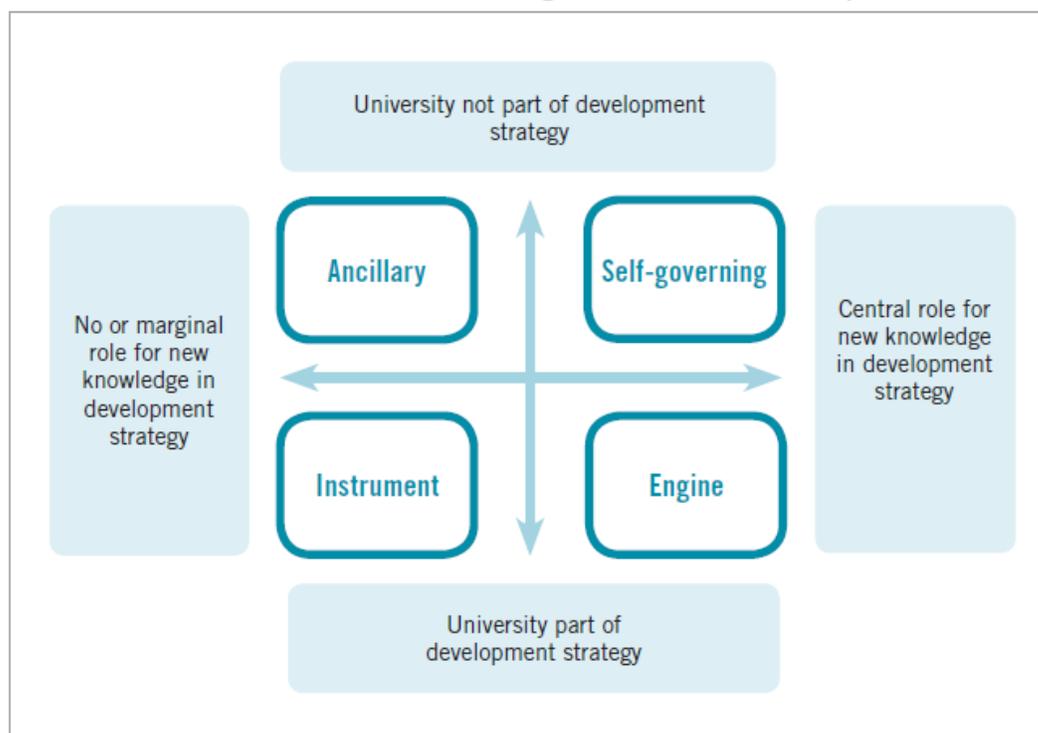
Elite, Mass and Universal Higher Education systems

Martin Throw (1973) postulates that the growth of Higher education systems globally can be classified into three levels, Elite, Mass and Universal. These levels differ in the size, access conditions, curriculum, instructional methods and other institutional characteristics. Gross enrollment ratio (GER) below 15% is considered to be 'Elite' higher education system. GER between 15% to 50% is considered to be 'Mass' and GER above 50% is considered to be 'Universal'. Elite higher education system focuses on preparation of elites for governance and the disciplines like medicine, law and theology will have the maximum preference and it emphasizes on the character building. Mass higher education system once again focuses on the preparation of elites but with a much broader sense, the preparation of leaders in the field of technology, sciences, economics etc.. Here more emphasis given to competence building than character building. Universal Higher education system focuses on accommodating and making the population ready for the ever changing social and technological requirements of industrial society (Trow 1973, s.8). With a GER of 25-26% Indian higher education system can be considered as a Mass Higher education system. The process of increasing the GER of an higher education system is called massification and it means improving the access, and it is primarily a quantification process and therefore the crisis of quantity Vs quality is already inherent in that process. As GER increases, objectives like character building, competence building, becomes less important and at universal higher education system, acquisition of an employable skill is the primary objective. Every higher education system is conscious about this inherent crisis and access, equity and quality becomes the essential pillars of discourses on higher education.

Classification of institutions/universities in higher education systems

In order to overcome the quantity Vs quality crisis in the higher education system, there are attempts to classify the institutions/ universities inside the higher education system.

FIGURE 1 The four notions of the role of knowledge and universities in development



Source: T.BAILEY, N. Cloete and P.Pillay, University and economic development in Africa, CHET, 2011.in Marta Montanini

Considering the qualitative role of universities for generating new knowledge and socio economic development, universities are classified into four groups in the above model. Ancillary university is that has a marginal role both in development of knowledge and social development. Instrumental university plays a marginal role in the development of new knowledge but has a better role in social development. Self governing universities emphasize on new knowledge development but do not consider as part of social development strategy. Engine Universities are those play predominant role in new knowledge creation and social development. Higher education institutions in India were classified based on their ownership, and sources of finances. Central universities were financed by the central government. State universities were financed by the state governments. Private universities were financed by the private bodies other than state or central governments. Based on the degree awarding rights, Indian institutions were classified into universities, colleges, deemed universities and stand alone institutions.

Paradigm shift and the crisis

In a general outlook, it seems that promoting high quality in higher education, favors the conventional offline in-class mode of teaching than ODL (online Distance learning) and multidisciplinary institutions than single

stream or stand alone academic institutions. At the same time there are serious attempts from the Indian government to strengthen the higher education through online platforms like e pathshala, NPTEL and Swayam platforms. UGC recommendations that students can earn academic credits by doing courses from Swayam Platform is a major step towards creating blended learning on a wider scale.

Academic programmes offered through ODL mode and when they are not offered in offline –class mode, can have negative impact on the quality of the higher education on two sides. Such a move further strengthens the commoditization and automatization of higher education. Automatization stands for replacing human mediation through computer controlled machines or Robots for the production of standardized goods to increase the profits. Under the pretext of cost reduction and to achieve universal access even the regulators like UGC too enchanted with these tendencies. NPTEL, Sakshat, e- pathasala are some of them. There are many number of private websites and players offer online classes to that extend some even claim that no need to go and attend school or college at all. Moreover online classes can democratize the life -long learning still remains as a myth and works only for those who are already trained in digital technology or have access to such technologies, or already acquired an understanding and skill for what to search and learn through an earlier education. So in reality such a move for ODL courses democratizes the education only among the already educated sections. Beyond that there is real risk that many of single stream and stand alone HEI, in the process of becoming multidisciplinary, takes the ODL mode and can become Diploma Mills (Noble F 1998) or Degree awarding Mills without having any class room teaching and teachers.

“The buyers of this packaged commodity (learning materials), meanwhile, other academic institutions, are able thereby to contract out, and hence outsource the work of their own employees and thus reduce their reliance upon their in-house teaching staff. Most important, once the faculty converts its courses to courseware, their services are in the long run no longer required” (Noble F 1998, p.363).

UNESCO World Conference, report (1997) emphasizes social responsibilities of higher education as the cultivation of civic virtues "shaping a democratic and civilized society". Besides that higher education institutions are expected to contribute to culture and cultural development of societies. This implies higher education institutions are expected to initiate and maintain critical discussion within societies. This is one of the traditional objectives of public intellectuals (Jacoby 1987) but it has also been defined as one of the goals of university researchers and professors in Finland (Välilä 2004). Brennan (2008) identifies education's role firstly in terms of constructing and supporting the 'knowledge society'. Second, there is a role in constructing the 'just and stable'

society. Third, there is a role in constructing the 'critical society'(Brennan 2008, p.387). All these observations clearly underlines that quality higher education means that which helps one to achieve full human potential but also to develop an equitable, just and critical society. Any attempt to push the one without the other does not make sense as individual and social aspects resembles two sides of the same coin. Therefore technology driven education (ODL) has to be reserved only for life- long learning. The policy guidelines on ODL courses needs to be revisited and to be restricted for only for life- long courses. ODL courses shall not be credited with Graduate and Post Graduate programmes but only after them. Attending an ODL course, shall be the free choice of the learner as an additional support for the in –class mode courses depends upon the individual learning requirements. Insensitive encouragement for ODL courses will eventually create two scenarios. Firstly quality higher education will not disappear but will soon reachable only for the privileged sections. That will go against the democratization of higher education for which the ODL is implemented in the first place. Most importantly when the learning happens in a ent-socialized contexts (without teacher and the co- learners), whether such an education can create human capital necessary for the socio –economic development or just convert future generation into foot soldiers for global capitalism demands immediate attention.

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