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SWAYAM MOOCs in Indian Education System : Bridging the Gap between Plain and Hilly Areas

Abstract : Education in hilly areas gets to face formidable difficulties because of arduous terrain, scattered population, shortage of infrastructure and teachers. Students of hilly areas do not have access to quality education and skill-based training. In this context, digital schemes like SWAYAM founded in 2017, have come out as remarkable tools for filling the disparity in education. SWAYAM plays a vital role in providing free online course in almost every subjects. Indian education system was altered after the advancement of technologies from web 2.0 to 3.0. Government of India has taken various measures to encourage digital learning. This paper aims to explore the strength of SWAYAM MOOCs in reducing educational disparities in hilly areas, highlighting merits such as affordability and quality content and demerits like poor internet connectivity and illiteracy of digital education. The study interprets that MOOCs can act as an asset for the students of hilly areas if support systems are ameliorated. This paper proposes that improving internet connectivity, setting up digital learning centres and increasing awareness programmes can help in enhancing cogency of SWAYAM in hilly areas.

Keywords : SWAYAM, MOOCs, Skill Based Learning, Digital Education.

Introduction : Learning means getting and improving knowledge, skills, behaviour and important values. Learning is not possible with appropriate use of tools and resources. Distance, Online or virtual learning is not a new idea. It started many years ago. In 1728, Caleb Williams started lectures through mail. In 1833, Lund University in Sweden started correspondence learning. During the time of radio and television, students used to listen lectures, but those lectures were confined to limited topics. After the development of internet, students can easily watch videos of experienced teachers. Students have everything at their finger tips. Education plays a vital role in bringing social equality and development of a country. Indian Education system is characterized by area wise disparity in quality education, specially between higher, middle and lower class. Hilly areas like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir face terrible challenges for giving quality education in higher education. The physical landscape always hampers the transportation, development of educational institute, and availability of qualified teachers. Some financially sound students migrate from hilly areas to plain areas for better educational opportunities which results in social and economic burden.

As per All India Survey on Higher Education, so many students are enrolled in colleges and universities. Despite this, access to quality education is uneven. With the advent of digital education, online education system has emerged as the best alternative for content delivery. One of the most influential schemes is SWAYAM, a national MOOC platform started by Ministry of Education in 2017. SWAYAM platform encourages learning beyond traditional setting. It gives knowledge to learners who face difficulty in getting proper knowledge. Removing all the barriers, it provides lectures of experienced teachers from home. The cost of this course is very low and can be watched again and again as the lectures are recorded.

Thus, MOOCs and Swayam platforms are the most powerful tools in enhancing education system, making learning accessible for rural areas of the country.

MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSE : The term MOOC was coined by Dave Cormier in 2008 at University of Manitoba. Through MOOC platform, almost all courses are available online without any geographical or financial constraints. It makes learning accessible to large number of students anytime and anywhere. It has outstanding features like audio- video lectures, self assessment and even certificates after completing courses. Due to this, it has become an important tool for making learning flexible and exhaustive. Universities have also started MOOC to enlarge educational access and encourage lifelong learning. It can help in national development of the country by empowering downtrodden people. People face difficulty in participation of campus based activities due to their financial and

geographical limitations. It helps students who study and earn money due to financial hardships. MOOC cannot expunge traditional method of teaching and learning, but it may play an important role in bridging the gap between privileged and under privileged students. Courses offered by prestigious universities help so many students who sometimes are unable to get admission in reputed colleges and universities. In another words, it is future of education system across the globe. It is being promoted by Ministry of Education to bridge the gap between developed and under developed cities of developing countries. MOOC also helps in corporate training as it can be used to enhance employee for learning. It has been used for innovation of platforms for brand promotion. In this way, it is useful not for students, but also for private companies. Nowadays, learning does not end even after completing studies. One has to keep oneself updated with new technologies and careers. After the development of web 4.0, demand for skilled manpower has increased in the fields like Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity and Cloud Computing. Thus, certificate based courses help in improving professional qualification. In Conclusion, MOOC displays a paradigm shift in education system by encouraging skill-based learning. However, there are several challenges such as inequality of digital equipment and limited interaction, even then its significance to homogenise education and enhance employability cannot be neglected. Its amalgamation into formal education system coupled with updated technologies can play a significant role in bringing reform in the future.

SWAYAM PRABHA : Swayam Prabha stands for study web for active learning for young aspiring minds. It is an initiative founded by Government of India under Ministry of Education. It provides quality education through DTH. It was launched for the purpose of democratizing education where internet connectivity is low. It has multiple DTH Channels. Students do not need any internet connectivity. The channels are run 24x7. Lectures are repeated so that students can easily watch as per their suitable time. It has educational content from school to college and competitive level. It adheres to the target of obtaining Gross Enrolment Ratio of 50% upto 2035 and 65% upto 2047. It has collaboration with august companies and industries. It helps in giving job related courses. It helps in enhancing professional skills for career advancement.

Swayam Prabha has four quadrants. They are divided as Video lecture, Study material, self assessment test, discussion forum. There are various channels in Swayam Prabha like Vageesh, Sanskriti, Prabodh, Saraswat, Prabandhan, Vidhik, Kautilya, Aryabhatt. They are subject specific channels. Since, education is the base for the development of our country, Swayam Prabha helps in democratizing educational content irrespective of hilly and plain area. In this way, it helps in reducing the gap between students of hilly and plain areas.

Conclusion : This paper aims to initiate deeper understanding of collaborators of SWAYAM-MOOC, including participants, instructors and providers. It deals with the challenges, drawbacks and advantages of online education system. This research shows that it is accessible to almost everybody. However, students in remote and hilly areas still face obstacles due to poor internet connectivity. People join courses for getting professional skills, education purpose, preparation in exams and self- assessment. By linking online and DTH based learning, gap of hilly and plain areas can be reduced in accessibility of educational content.

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