
Interlinking Lifelong Learning and Internationalization of Higher Education in India - A critical discourse

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ABSTRACT :

Lifelong Learning (LLL) signifies to all forms of learning activities and higher education is considered one of them. In recent years, the perception of LLL is changing towards a more market centric one and promoting the neoliberal values, which percolate into the higher education reforms internationally. India, being a developing country with layers of socio-economic-education disparities is trying to complete globally to become a knowledge superpower by focusing on human resource development. Consequently, it emphasizes on expanding higher education with the similar LLL principals, seen internationally. Hence, it seems that LLL, higher education reforms, market and internationalisation are interlinked in a complex manner.

The paper, therefore, concentrates on explaining two major issues- first, factors influencing the higher education reforms and their relations with the changing dimensions of LLL, market and internationalisation. Second, how the whole issue is interlinked in a complex and dynamic way and what are the consequences on the recent Indian higher educational reforms. By using the scholarly works of Altbach (2003, 2008), Jarvis (2007, 2008), Tilak (2005) and Knight (2006) (among others), the paper tries to argue that the changing notions of LLL in India can certainly provide directions in which higher education is likely to metamorphose.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Higher education, educational reform, market capitalism.

SETTING THE SCENE:

Lifelong Learning (LLL) literally means all forms of learning activities carried out throughout the lifespan. Eventually, higher education also falls under the umbrella term of LLL along with other forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Interestingly, higher education gains importance in recent times in the discourse of LLL, as the contemporary LLL is mostly perceived as a learning mechanism to reorient the education of 21st century. It promotes the mantra of learning throughout lives and up-grade the skills and competencies continually in order to be dynamic and competitive in the globalizing economy. This clear utilitarian understanding of LLL is somewhat different from the traditional Indian understanding of the aforesaid, which harnessed the philosophy of ‘learn as long as you live’ to find the ultimate wisdom. The economic dimension was nowhere in the periphery of traditional LLL in India.

Mainly after the economic restructuring in India in the 90s and significantly in the post 2K period, the perception of LLL started changing, also in India (Shah, 1999, 2008;

Bhola, 2003). It started taking reference from the globally dominating perspective of LLL and the traces can be found on the policies and reports of National Knowledge Commission (NKC), Planning Commission of India (PCI), University Grants Commissions (UGC) and so on. Increased importance on higher education could also be seen in this renewing discourse of LLL, which in spite of being present globally, relatively new for India. Significantly, higher education reforms in India seems taking references from popular educational reforms around the world, mostly that of the developed West. The path for higher education reforms in the West is however, largely influenced by the new principles of LLL, where it is considered as one of the most important sectors for skills and competences building. In India, it also seems gaining importance, with the ambition to become a ‘knowledge society’, where educated and proactive learners would be essential for the success in this increasingly knowledge driven economy. In this regard, it may appear that there is a direct link between the changing discourse of LLL, recent higher education reforms, market and internationalization.

Contrastingly, the socio-economic and educational scenario of India is distinctly different from that of the developed West and even after several decades of independence, it is riddled with colossal problems of illiteracy, extreme poverty, socio-economic inequality, discriminations and so on. These darker sides of India are still very much present even after its ‘proud’ claims of becoming one of the fastest growing economies and massifying its higher education to become the third largest in the world. Moreover, these backlogged socio-economic-educational problems could pose considerable amount of hindrance to the seamless penetration of free market and internationalization in the Indian higher education arena. Hence, it seems that the linkages between LLL, higher education reforms, market and internationalisation is immensely complex in nature. Especially in India, it involves several other sub factors, forces and power relations, which demands detailed analysis. Therefore, to explore the issue critically, this paper seeks to understand *how are the changing notions of lifelong learning in Indian higher education influenced by market and internationalisation in recent times?*

To explore, it seems also important to clarify; what is the changing notion of LLL; which are the major factors related influencing the market penetration in the context of India; why and how are they interlinked and how complexly they are influencing the higher education reforms in India? Here, it is worth mentioning that, the study tries to explore the discourse critically in the contemporary context of India and encourage further studies in this field. It also seems important to note that apart from LLL, market and internationalization, there are several other important factors influencing the changing landscape of Indian higher education. However, they are not discussed here to keep the paper focused. Hence, the study mainly concentrates on explaining two major issues- first, factors influencing the higher education reforms and their relations with the changing dimensions of LLL, market and internationalisation. Second, how the whole issue is interlinked in a complex and dynamic way and what are the consequences on the recent Indian higher educational reforms. Since it is immensely difficult to portray the scenario of higher education reforms for the whole country, considering its diversities, federal structure etc., the paper mainly concentrates on analysing the national policy aspects of it. To analyse, it takes references from several scholarly works, namely

Altbach, 2003, 2008; Altbach et. al, 2009; Jarvis, 2007, 2008, Tilak, 2005; Knight, 2006 among others.

THE CHANGING CONTEXTS OF LLL

Scholarly works of Shah (1993, 1999, 2008, 2009, 2012), Bhola (1996, 1998, 2008), Mandal (1993) (among others) provide important insights into the development of the dimensions of LLL in India. It can be seen that LLL has evolved several times. The table below (Table 1) could help us to understand the broad temporal development of LLL in India.

CHANGING CONCEPT OF LLL IN INDIA			
Approaches	Cycles & periods	Key Concepts	Focus
Traditional & Religious	First Cycle (1882-1947)	Basic Literacy	Night Schools, Social Reform Movements
Life-oriented	Second Cycle (1949-1966)	Civic Literacy	Social Education
Work-oriented	Third Cycle (1967-1977)	Functional literacy	Farmers Education and Functional Literacy Program, Workers Schools
Social change	Fourth Cycle (1978-1995)	Developmental literacy	National Adult Education Program, Mass Program of Functional Literacy, Total Literacy Campaigns, Continuing Education.

Table 1. Changing Concept of LLL in India. Derived from: S.Y.Shah, An Encyclopedia of Indian Adult Education, New Delhi: National Literacy Mission, Government of India, 1999, p-5:

However, from the above table, and based on present discourse of LLL it seems possible to add another cycle, which is in fact, the focused timeline of this paper.

Economic development oriented - Learning Society	Fifth Cycle (1995 -2000 and Post 2000- till date)	Lifelong Learning	Revised adult education program;- LLL Focus on economic development, Skills and competences development; Vocational education and training, LLL in higher education, Open Basic Education and Modern Conceptualization of LLL influenced by the National Knowledge Commission, India.
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LLL has several facets and directions (Field, 2006) and it is important to analyze it in a certain context. Jarvis (2007, 2008). It points out that LLL is a dynamic process in a

globalised world. According to his theory, it can be seen that LLL is ‘never neutral and it always occurs within socio-economic and political context’. In this regard, Jarvis (2008) mentions about an interlinked global-social structure and explains that there are dominating forces seek to modify the directions of LLL towards advanced capitalism and pro-globalisation. However, these changes are not universally welcomed and there is resistance to it. The long-haul socio-economic educational underdevelopments, illiteracy, poverty etc. are working as counter forces against the neoliberal power quotients. These counter forces oppose and try to keep the welfare dimensions of education as a social good. These forces could stem from the policy, civil society, union legislations, non-government organisations etcetera in different ways (Jarvis, 2007). The following sections attempt to analyse some of these factors and focus more on linking higher education with LLL, market and internationalization in the context of India.

MAJOR FACTORS, INFLUENCING CONTEMPORARY INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Regarding the interlink ages between LLL, popular higher education reforms, market, and internationalization, Knight’s (2006) study highlights some salient points. It shows that the elements of globalisation such as the knowledge economy, ICT, Market economy, trade liberalisation, changing governance, domination of corporate culture etc. have immense impact on higher education, globally. Directly and indirectly, they promote continuing education or LLL, skills and competences development, mainly in professional fields and create a greater demand for higher education. This demand brings new types of private and public initiatives providing education in a completely new fashion and often across geographical borders. Consequently, the traditional role of the universities changes and new types of universities/ higher educational institutes emerges to serve the changing needs. Significantly, they become more commercialised and demand-driven. Due to increase commercialisation and the demand-driven higher education, the programs tend to become more responsive to market needs. Specialised training programs develop out of the demand of the market.

As the market gets global/ international, so does the learners, at least those who have access to technology, merit and/or paying capacities. Hence, the learners and academics move across national/ regional borders, both physically and virtually also indicating towards the upsurge of distance education due to improved ICTs. The MOOCs or the Massive Open Online Courses is a prime example of this phenomenon. These new types of cross-border educational providers have to perform in different cultures and countries, and thus, indirectly promote homogenisation as well as new opportunities for hybridisation and internationalisation (Knight, 2006: 210).

Now, there are two major points seems important to be considered here. First, although several of these trends depicted by Knight (2006) are visible in India, not all of the elements of globalisation are likely to be applicable for the Indian higher education scenario. Second, not every consequences of globalisation would affect India and its higher education in the same way as analysed by Knight (2006). Moreover, there might be some more points to be considered here; which are outside the general discussion. In addition, there are several

ironies related with the competitive reforms in response to the economic globalisation. It is often seen as a territorial threat that globalisation poses on the state, to re-territorialise control over its economies. Secondly, the market driven reforms are tend to squeeze-out the equity driven mandates and erode the safety nets from the underprivileged (Mundy, 2005). Therefore, although there might not be a strong resistance to the higher educational reforms as such, as it apparently intends to improve the employability; but there are possible demands to the government to stop the market from taking an overarching role, overlooking the social responsibilities. Nevertheless, these elements and their impacts may provide a clearer picture of the internationalizing higher education reform agendas and help to analyse the roadmap better. Interestingly, the policies have to react to all the different pressures, those from the market, the civil society and so on. The following analyses of the selected reform agendas of some of the Indian policy documents depict these aspects of ‘reforming’ and ‘safeguarding’ rather clearly.

The latest 12th Plan appreciates the expansion of higher education but acknowledges that the rising aspirations of young people, improved schooling, and the fact that jobs created through rapid economic growth and skill-based technical change require effective and immediate higher educational reforms (Planning Commission, 2013: 97). It highlights that the system is still underperforming and unable to provide enough quality human resources, who are equipped with the required knowledge and skills to cater to the needs of the changing economy. To meet these diverse and dynamic needs, the plan sketches out some key principles for expanding higher education, which are going to drive the reforms and set pathways for future. The plan however, not just recommends the higher education to follow the popular trajectories of development in science and technology, but also encourages general higher education to become more skill oriented, many of which are directly being linked with the core skills of LLL. The Plan says that-

If properly imparted, general education could be an excellent foundation for successful knowledge-based careers. Therefore, focus should be primarily on improving the quality of general education. Graduates should be able to acquire skills beyond the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic (the ‘3Rs’). Critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (The 4Cs) are increasingly important now. Special emphasis on verbal and written communication skills, especially, but not limited to English, would go a long way in improving the employability of the large and growing mass of disempowered youth (Planning Commission, 2013: 106).

At a glance, the recent higher education reform agendas in India seems representing a consolidated picture of ‘faster development’ and ‘development for all’, which, it is trying to achieve by focusing more on the market and the following the neo liberal notion of LLL. However, it also demands a balance between the two extremes by focusing on non-technical subjects, which apparently has less market demands. However, Tilak (2012) thinks that many of these are ‘loud policy statements’ and although these internationalised market-oriented reforms may promote faster economic growth, but would most likely to fail to promote the inclusive growth as they are largely based on “incompatible strategies” that primarily promote the “privatisation mantra”. To him, the policy statements like the ‘holistic development’ or the ‘balanced approach to target the under-represented sections of the society’ or even the statement like ‘no student who is eligible to be admitted should be deprived of higher education for financial reasons’ look like “rhetorical” (Tilak, 2012: 26-41).

At this point, the study could perhaps question the core intention of the policy itself, which would help to depict the resistance towards internationalised reforms even further. It might be asked, who would be responsible for the development of all, when the central level policies largely adopts a predominantly neo-liberal principles more than the welfare one, which could also mean that the non-profitable have risks to be marginalised? This brought the analysis to its next level, where the paper seeks to analyse these rather opposing nature of the Indian education policies.

THE CONTRASTING FACETS

To analyse the underlying principles of the recent policies, this paper selects three parameters, namely, ‘relevance’, ‘professional soundness’ and ‘practicalities’ (after Bhola, 2003). Interestingly, the policy emerges as ‘relevant’ and ‘not so relevant’ depending on the position from which it is analysed, similar to that the theory of Jarvis (2008) which argued to analyse LLL from different standpoints. From a utilitarian point of view, the agendas of a neo-liberal, market oriented, demand driven, and professional higher educational reform seems justified and professionally sound, as this could provide India a much-needed economic and educational development and may provide an advantageous edge internationally. However, analysing it from a welfare angle, these ambitious reform agendas are perhaps plausible but not so practical, considering the enormous size, diversities and inequalities existing in almost every section of Indian socio-economic-educational landscape. Moreover, it is less fruitful to those, who cannot afford and/or access paid quality higher education facilities, and that number is very large indeed. Therefore, the complexity of reforming higher education and making it more internationalised appears greater than it apparently seems. Hence, the dynamics is immensely complex. But how is it associated with the changing notion of LLL?

LINKING LLL AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Following Jarvis’s (2007, 2008) theoretical arguments, it can be inferred that since the changes in LLL and associated education reforms are determined by the dynamics of power, which, by its very nature is not neutral, it is perhaps over simplified to assume that the policies are opting for a neutral or equal fortune for all. In this regard, Jarvis (2007:43) highlights that, it is the market competition, which holds a major key to create a fast moving world, where the players have to sell their product in the global market to survive and thrive. Hence, there is a significant amount of pressure on the nations to innovate constantly and market them, as well as find new markets. Consequently, it supports new learning and on the other, by its very nature, supports certain modes of continuous learning, mainly which help to support the market to thrive. In other words, the core supports a certain kind of LLL, which gives importance to economy-oriented knowledge, supports flexible, skills and competence based, outcome oriented learning for faster changes. Hence, it promotes employability over employment, skills over degrees and learning over education. It emphasises on how the production system should be and how people should learn constantly to keep them upgraded in order to get and remain employable. It puts pressure on the institutes and countries to make necessary changes in their education systems and policies. The base of influencing up to the individual level is related to the enormous development in the ICT, shift from an industrial

model of economy to knowledge oriented one, which makes the entire economic system immensely flexible and mobile. Consequently, the pressure is also on promoting internationalisation, individualisation, privatisation, use of modern ICT, networking etc., but more than anything, on the human resource development to support the market and economy.

To support this dynamic system, it requires an equally dynamic and highly educated pool of human resources, who are also flexible, mobile and lifelong learners. However, for that to happen, it requires a flexible education system and an internationally compatible higher educational setup as higher education is the closest educational arena to the market, in the sense that it is supposed to finally prepare the learners for the world of work. Hence, to support the system, it requires policies at all levels, which are largely unidirectional (supports stability and homogeneity) yet robust to support all the requirements of the fast changing knowledge based economy. However, the neoliberal markets cannot make policies. It is the job of the governments. However, it can certainly influence national and transnational entities to make policies in their support, through complex networking and strategies. On the contrary, national policies cannot directly accept everything recommended by the market. It needs to maintain a critical balance, for several valid reasons. First, the policies are build for a nation and not for a corporation, hence the profit mechanisms is difficult to conceive. Moreover, in a democracy like India, where political power directly depends on the voting of the common people, the government, at least in its policies, has to be pro-people and pro-development at the same time.

The recent National Five Year Plans (Xth, XIth and XIIth) continues with this ‘balancing’ agenda of reform and recognises that “higher education will be a key driver in an increasingly globalised and knowledge-driven world” (Planning Commission, 2007). The basic difference between this trend and that of the discourse of LLL, is that, in higher educational policies, improving the traditional subjects, their evaluation methods etc. means bringing them in tune with the modern global practices in the long run. Whereas in case of LLL, the effort largely consist of keeping and continuing with the traditional perspectives as the problems (e.g. illiteracy) are basic and could not be overcome since decades. Contrastingly, in the higher education policy domain, there is a pro-active trend to bridge the gap to make the ground as level as possible, so that the policies, the state, the market can operate seamlessly.

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM AND LLL- A ROAD TOWARDS INTERNATIONALISATION?

Several points can be drawn from the above discussion. First, it seems that the higher educational reforms has a clear agenda of promoting the market and make it as a tool and trigger for changing the existing system. In this process, the market works as a direct driving force. Additionally, the internal demands for employment oriented higher education and the willingness to pay are not just boosting the claims of the market-oriented reforms, but also taking the responsibility from the government and shifting it to the hand of the learners. These new-age learners buy the educational services and learns continually (formally, non-formally and informally) to keep pace with the changing situation. Institutions also learn and refocus their education to become more learner and economy oriented. These basic principles of the new LLL of the developed West seem even more prominent in the higher educational domain. Fundamentally, the Indian policies seems also supporting this new paradigm of LLL.

The market dominance here is swifter and the influence is more prominent. There are however, resistance to privatisation, economically expensive nature of the higher education. Nevertheless, these are not so powerful counter forces to stop the progress of the neoliberal progression as there is also support from a large section of population who can get or hope to get the benefits from these changes. Contrastingly, some higher educational institutions are still trying to perform in a traditional way, but they are fast becoming marginalised or they are incentivised to change. Hence, the indigenous process of practicing higher education on a welfare mechanism, as opposed to the market one, might not going to be strongly evident in the near future in the Indian higher educational domain. However, the policies still mention them, and sometimes the welfare discourse demands its presence in the policies, rather strongly.

Jarvis (2008) explains this trend of balancing the situation while opting for a paradigmatic change. This response, according to Habermas (2006: 81 in Jarvis, 2008:52), is one of the general responses to globalisation at national levels. Habermas (2006) however mentions about two effects, namely- the ‘cushioned’, and ‘catch up’. The later, according to the theory, is a vague concept that the politics will eventually catch up with the market and will be eventually able to regulate them. The first one however thinks and responds differently. It recognises that the forces of global capitalism is unleashed and cannot be tamed. Therefore, the government has to introduce policies that can cushion the effect and let welfare sustain. Jarvis (2008) claims that elements of both types are sometimes present in some cases. In India, this seems valid, as on the one hand, the policy assumes that the country needs to catch up with the market to achieve a stage of individual, societal and national development. On the other hand, it tries to protect the traditional welfare practices, which help to cushion the fury of global capitalism from creating further inequalities. This mixed mechanism could perhaps be termed as the ‘third way’ after Giddens (1998) and Jarvis (2008). India seems following this way more than other while opting for a faster reform path. However, we have seen in the initial discussion of LLL that, there are contradictions, dilemmas related with almost every step of reform. It boils down to India’s inequality and Tilak (2006), Bhola (2003), Bhushan (2009) seem right to point that out that a unidirectional market oriented reform is perhaps not the right answer for India.

CONCLUSION

It seems quite evident from the above discussion that a need for a change is also felt from within the system, which coins that the demand is also coming from the aspiring Indians. The direction of change/ reform however set by the global competitions and in the line of the international higher educational reforms. The interesting point is that, although the market is given higher value but the government’s responsibility in providing safeguards to the downtrodden has also been mentioned repeatedly. This helps to analyse the dynamics of pressure on the society from above and below, where the policies, in spite of leaning towards the market, cannot ignore its social responsibilities. It also seems a very challenging yet a crucial task for the higher education reforms to deal with all these diversities, dilemmas, contradictions and inequalities and at the same time to be able to direct the policy in a certain direction. It has become even more challenging with the introduction of the dimensions of

globalisation in it. The policies seem to realise that too and hence want to move forward with a mixed approach of reforms, which is referred as the ‘third way’ in this paper.

This act of ‘balancing’ is related with the fact the India is a country with a massive degree of inequality and in this biggest democracy, political power largely depends on the votes of the majority, many of whom demand safeguards from the government in return. Therefore, a one sided policy is clearly, not sustainable. This could thus be considered as an effort from the reform agendas to be as practical as possible, in terms of projecting its *implementability* in the long run. These balancing efforts are thus, the results of the constant pressure from the counter forces of economic globalisation. However, the intensity in which these counter forces are opposing the international dimensions and trying to balance the situation to make it suitable for all, are weaker than the trend, following the internationalised reforms. Therefore, LLL here largely works as a development code or an umbrella framework rather than a clear guideline to drive educational reforms. In India, it is more in a transition stage, influenced both by global and traditional perspectives and hence, appears as somewhat non-standardised. However, in the midst of internationalization and massification of higher education, the dominant principles of LLL appears as powerful from its core to influence different educational domains. In this sense, LLL is perhaps not yet a highway to internationalize Indian higher education but can certainly provide directions in which it is likely to transform.

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