

Actuating Soft-Skills through E-Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract – Higher education and skill development play a vital in the development of an individual as well as the whole society. Presently, education is closely connected with employability where soft skills are regarded as pre-requisites. Soft skills refer to a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes that contribute to become an employable and a successful professional. Good communication skills are indispensable asset of a profession. Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading skills (LSWR) are undoubtedly regarded as cornerstone of success in a profession and also determiners of a person's competency to fit into a particular ambience that is another objective of Higher education in the modern times. According to Daneil Goleman, soft skills contribute to a person's ability to manage himself or herself and relate to other people. These skills matter twice as much as Intelligent Quotient(IQ) or technical skills in employability. Excellence in education demands the education of necessary skills in order to make the masses self-sufficient, employable or entrepreneurs. It is time for teachers, trainers and stakeholders to incorporate soft skills in their education and its practice because imparting soft skills would preferably aim at the individual's competencies not only to collect and transform knowledge. It also reflects on the complexity and interrelations of behaviour as well as decision-making in a futuristic and global perspective. The present paper focuses on the issues and concerns related to soft skills and entrepreneurship in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Soft-skills, Entrepreneurship, Economy

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Higher education is critical for developing a country, a modern economy and a vibrant policy. It equips young people with skills required for employability and the opportunity for social mobility. It also contributes in preparing the stakeholders responsible for their duties and obligations as it is the backbone of the educational system of any country. Higher education is undoubtedly the critical pillar of human development and an engine of development of the knowledge based society. India's higher education system is the globally recognized and well ranked in terms of students. After independence there has been a remarkable change in the patterns of imparting education particularly higher education. The recent initiative in this area of higher education, the Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) has focussed on access, equity and quality through creation, expansion and consolidation of institutions, research and innovations.

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Excellence in education demands the education of necessary skills in order to make the masses self-sufficient, employable or entrepreneurs. It is time for teachers, trainers and stakeholders to incorporate soft skills in their education and its practice because imparting soft skills would preferably aim at the individual's competencies not only to collect and transform knowledge. It also reflects on the complexity and interrelations of behaviour as well as decision-making in a futuristic and global perspective.

The present paper focuses on the issues and concerns related to soft skills in higher education.

The new digital technologies have permeated economy, politics, workplaces, the ways we communicate with each other as well as operation of all levels of education from kindergarten to doctoral studies. Learning is using technology to deliver training anytime, anywhere where the learners receive the content at real time or the learners can pace their own learning. Utilizing the internet to deliver e-learning initiatives has created expectations both in business market and in higher education institutions. This idea of engaging with people through technology is cost effective. E-Learning is an adaptive learning method which is learner centered and also promotes social and collaborative learning. It provides a way to better management of large group of students, while maintaining increased retention and a stronger grasp on the subject. Its major role is to provide greater flexibility of access.

Communication technologies are generally categorized as asynchronous or synchronous. Asynchronous activities use technologies such as blogs, wikis, and discussion boards. Synchronous activities involve the exchange of ideas and information with one or more participants during the same period of time. Learning management system and learning content management system is software used for delivering tracking the managing training education Luskin says that the “e” should be interpreted to mean exciting, energetic, enthusiastic, emotional, extended, excellent, and educational in addition to “electronic” that is a traditional national interpretation. This broader interpretation allows for 21st century applications for the improvement of Higher Education. Rapid changes in the technologies are indicating that the role of E-learning in future will grow tremendously in education.

The objective of the present paper is to explore how e-learning can make education more flexible and reachable to the last person of our social strata in the 21st century.

Today's education system has adopted podcasting as an instructional tool used extensively by the learners as an artefact and evidence of learning. Actually, a podcast is typically an audio file that is downloaded and listened to. People generally produce podcasts to share ideas, presentations, or music. It is an emerging method that reinforces particular tasks, promotes different activities and also supports an independent learning as an alternative approach to teaching and learning process. Usually podcasts are linked from a blog, so "podcasting" is often used to denote audio-blogging. Podcasting as a tool, allows the teachers to share their ideas and suggestions in order to improve their approaches of teaching. It is useful for recording a teacher's lesson and a student's conversation or both. It plays a very important role in academics, which can

be later seen as a development of Rapid E-Learning as the content, through podcasting can be created swiftly and without much effort.

As an emerging trend, Podcasting is considered as a medium which allows students to use technologies based on entertainment systems such as portable audio players (e.g. an iPod) for educational experiences. Podcasts emerge to proffer convenient professional development and opportunities to the teachers which can give them later the freedom to select what, when and where they want to learn with an objective to make their teaching-learning more interesting and output-oriented. The institutions can use podcasts to make announcements via their Web site. Instead of making viewers come to the website that houses, the content can be updated whenever they want, users could count on the receiver to do it instead-tracking all the podcast feeds they liked and automatically saving them to the computer. These include a hands-on and reflective approach to copyright and fair use in creating digital media.

Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs), nowadays, have also begun adopting podcasting as an instructional tool. These are used for many educational as well as instructional purposes. On the other hand; there are a number of advocates of podcasting who consider that it may offer us unique educational benefits to learner. The main benefit of podcasting is its simplicity and assistance that it offers to learners. Listeners of present world are not at all inhibited by time and space with regard to their learning. In addition to this, some argue that podcasts help students learn 21st century literacy skills.

Employability refers to a person's ability to be qualified and ready for work. In today's scenario, just getting a degree in engineering is not sufficient; an engineer must have the capability to excel in all the fields for a job. An engineer cannot just rely on his degree alone to automatically open doors to success. It certainly unlocks the door up to some extent; it just makes you eligible for the job and not qualified for it. Companies and enterprises today need graduates who are enterprising, adaptable and hard working, having a good degree and qualified with a range of vital skills. Communication skills play an important role in it. In parallel to intellectual development, engineers must focus on communication skills development that elevates to an honourable height. Engineers must focus on principles of communication effectively and enhance their skills. Having good communication skills along with technical skills is a must. These soft skills are complementary to technical skills. Communication skills are a key to success in any field because language used is full of Jargon. Development of communication skills further leads to inter personal skills and finally increasing the chances of employability.

Educators who use podcasting with students argue that it offers learners and teachers flexibility as well as learner control, opportunities for learner motivation, clarity of instruction, novelty of engagement, widening of 'locations' in which learning is situated – an expansion of the temporal and spatial, engagement with and collaboration around dialogue, and opportunities for learners to get involved in construction of learning for others. (Warren, K. 2011). Students, for example, can use digital audio recording and editing software to create audio dramas, news shows or audio tours, etc. Some researchers also argue that podcasting if produced by students can uphold several powerful ideas that students can use over a generation. This process includes a hands-on and introspective approach to copyright and fair use in creating digital media. This will help them, to create unique and original content as they ethically and efficiently collect and remix the work of others. Thus, it is argued that podcasting has become a tool for students as well as for teachers/instructors to think about the balance between individual rights and benefits of community and nation.

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