**World University**

In looking to a new global paradigm to address global challenges, education should occupy a central place. It is a critical determinant of the employability and productivity of the workforce. It is an insurance against poverty. Unemployment rates worldwide are lowest for those with tertiary education. The highest rates of unemployment are recorded by those without a high school diploma. Education is the best known safeguard against extremism. Education is a principle factor determining the functioning of democratic forms of governance. Higher levels of public education are essential for addressing ecological and social issues and overcoming the frictions of globalization and cultural differences. It is the first vaccine against diseases.

A huge gap exists between the educational potential and existing levels of education in both developed and developing nations. In developed nations it is largely a qualitative gap between the education that is offered and what is required to equip student for the future, as witnessed by rising levels of unemployment. There needs to be a radical shift from preparing students to seek salaried jobs in major corporations to preparing them to create their own jobs through self-employment and entrepreneurship.

In developing countries the quantitative levels of education are far below levels in the West. Faculty positions remain vacant. There are not enough colleges and classrooms to accommodate all those who seek education. The cost of education is increasing. Those with special needs are left out of mainstream education. Education is affected in conflict areas.

A closer look at the Indian college scenario shows that more than half the permanent faculty positions are vacant. The current tertiary enrollment rate is 19%. In order to raise this to 95%, 95 million new students will have to be enrolled in college. 132,000 new colleges will need to be built to accommodate these new students, and 4.1 million new lecturers will need to be appointed to teach them. In 65 years of independence, India today has reached a position where it has 33,000 colleges and .82 million lecturers. The time, cost , effort and resources required to multiply these educational resources by 4-5 times in an immense challenge.

Such a situation exists not only in India but in many places in the world. If all those of college going age need to be enrolled in some form of tertiary education, then China will have to send 85 million youngsters to college, Pakistan will have to accommodate 17 million new students. The world over, more than 366 million youngsters need to be enrolled in college.

It is hard to imagine expanding the traditional college classroom to provide education for all these millions. A solution to this challenge is a virtual university. Imagine the best lecturers in each subject teaching over the internet, providing education to all those who seek it all over the world. Their lecturers could be recorded and made available on the internet. This would be democratization of education. Studies confirm that the quality of on-line education can equal or exceed that of traditional classroom learning.

The advantage of the internet is that multimedia technology makes so much more available than just videotaped lecturers. There exists a varied mix of media beyond the reach of most colleges – e books, video and audio lecturers, animations, movies. Imagine learning geography through a virtual visit to the place being studied, history through documentaries and dramatic presentations of historical events, great works of literature through the performances of famous actors, science through films of actual experiments and conversations with famous scientists. Study materials could be readily translated into all languages.

While expansion of traditional educational facilities is very slow and expense, online education can be rapidly expanded to raise the average level of education. A virtual class of 30 students can expanded to teach 300 students, even 300,000 students. Internet does not have many of the constraints that a brick and mortar classroom faces.

Syllabus updation can be done constantly. In many colleges, this is done at best once a few years. There are instances where students study technology has become outdated and is no longer in use. Virtual classrooms can revise the syllabus to keep up with the latest advances in each field, without having to reprint tens of thousands of textbooks. On line education can be paced to adapt to the speed and capacity of each individual student, so above average learners can proceed much more quickly and others can take more time.

Some colleges in the developed countries have educational resources for those with physical challenges and special needs. These could be made available to all such students, in places where such resources are not even conceived of yet. On line education lends itself to be customized and specialized to meet the varied interests and needs of students, far more than is possible in the bulk educational delivery system now prevalent for higher education. In a world where the cost of education is rising rapidly beyond the reach of many students even in Western countries, online learning represents a way to deliver education at a fraction of the cost of traditional classroom education.

These advantages provide compelling justification for major efforts to expand on-line education in both developed and developing countries. This is already happening. Over the past three years, on line higher education in the USA has finally taken off. Cite some data for USA and even for India if you have time to find any.

Online education has been around for years, but most of what colleges offer are an extension of what they offer in their classrooms. It is a bottom up approach to expand the reach of their existing facilities. There have been a lot of new initiatives, especially in the form of MOOCs now. This is still an evolving field, but it clearly holds great potential. What the world really needs is a global system designed from the beginning with the future needs of all humanity in mind and tailored to deliver world class education to as many students who seek it wherever they are in the world. We may refer to it as a World Virtual University.

While much of the instruction could be delivered on line, proven techniques are available which combine instruction with online seminars and discussions, networking between students, student counseling and job placement, project work and even personal assistance by guides either on line or through personal meetings in the students’ locale.

Education is directly or indirectly related to all the global challenges we face today. It is required to remove unemployment, poverty, extremism, child labor. It helps control population explosion, check the spread of diseases , safeguard the environment and so much more. Education holds the key to solving these problems. And in the future of education, online education holds a central place.

Creation of a World-class Global Virtual University open and affordable is one of the most potent and effective means for preparing youth for the future that is coming.