

## **digital LEARNING Higher Education Summit – Call for Leveraging Potentials**

Higher education in India currently is going through a transitional phase while coming across a critical era of development and turmoil. Witnessing and getting into the process of upholding the glory of the developmental phases, digitalLEARNING magazine organised the Higher Education Summit with the aim of stimulating debate and shaping strategies to deal with the rising challenges of the inclusion of ICT in the higher education sector on 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 2010. The Summit whirled debates on the key developmental agenda that will revolutionise the application of ICT in learning and administrative facilities for higher education institutes across India.

### **There is a need**

There is a need indeed. Taking the cue from the requirements and demands of higher education in the country, the challenge is to 'getting it right,' into delivering rightly the core business of teaching and learning, research, and contribution to the industry, community and above all the society.

But as the world is now a global village and India is standing at the threshold of that increasing and grasping stage of globalisation, it can be anticipated that the higher education system shall be operating in an increasingly challenging, competitive and complex world.

Competition is everywhere in today's world and higher education is one of the rapidly evolving sectors in the field. Therefore, the competition has become imperative. Further to that, aim of the summit has been tagged with the goal to enable the CIOs of the higher education institutions to share the best practices of supporting the academic mission, meeting the increasing demands of ICT in their organisations.

The objective of the summit is to bring together the stakeholders of the higher education sector and the technology providers on the same platform to stir debates on the rapid technological changes and to bring forth the assumption that the most creative, innovative and challenging in the leadership will emerge as the winner in the difficult climate.

### **Pointing towards the necessity**

The summit has stimulated discussion on some of the key topics including Using technology for implementation of examination and assessment in an unified way, Teacher training and refresher courses in technology for updating teachers, Creating a technology map for a higher education institution, Future priorities for higher education IT development, The role of technology in supporting off-campus education, Enhancing the online admissions process, Managing multi-site data centres – challenges and benefits , Examining the introduction of the virtualised IT environment and Addressing the increasingly complex issue of information management.

The summit was a prolific platform of sessions with the factors that cover 360' of the issues in the sector, following to a successful celebration of Welcome, Inaugral and the Keynote address of the day further to witness deliberations on the themes of Leveraging Technology for Providing Quality in Higher Education: Vision & Strategies, Distance Education: Democratising the Dissemination of Quality Education, Technology Enabled Campus : Creating a Roadmap to Match Global Classrooms, On-line Examinations as a part of IT Supported Examination Process Chain, Challenges and Opportunities and Ushering in Virtual Learning Environment in Higher Education.

## **The session details**

The summit was inaugurated with the Welcome Address by Dr M P Narayanan, President, Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies and a Theme Address by Dr Ravi Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, digital LEARNING Magazine on how the magazine aims of promoting and aiding the use of ICT in education, with a clear focus on the current trends, perspectives, researches, discussions and initiatives of various countries of the world in the field of ICT and education. Thus, over the years, this monthly education magazine has built up a vast body of knowledge that can help organisations and government agencies regarding e-learning initiatives or other technology mediated learning. The initiative is based on the understanding that technology can play a pivotal role in improving access and quality of education throughout the world.

The Keynote Address on the summit was delivered by Prof VN Rajashekhaan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Prof Deepak Pentel, Vice Chancellor, Delhi University and Sushma Berlia, President, Apeejay Styta Group.

While delivering his speech, Prof Pillai stated it very clearly, “The challenge in higher education is accessibility to a large number of learners. But we also have to focus on Vocational Education that will give us skilled professionals. But in all the cases, enhancing GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio) is not possible without the capacity building of the teachers for which ICT plays a crucial role. We need smart classrooms, employable graduates, on-line capabilities of day to day functionalities of educational institutes, and of course quality research fellows who can take the knowledge network forward.”

“I appreciate the efforts of digital LEARNING magazine. That's because it is talking about the advancement of technology into education,” says Prof Pentel at DU. According to him further, “The University is now looking for more and more accessibility at distant parts of the country. We are looking forward to technically advanced courses like distance learning and open learning options. We already have more than three lakhs of students in open learning. We also started Institute of Life Long Learning at the University. Although, at DU Post Graduation and Research take priorities. Our challenge is now to excel at every stage and for that we need the support of ICT.”

Ms. Berlia at Apeejay makes it clear saying, “India is all on the growth trajectory. But to fill in the existing gaps we need skilled manpower and more access to higher education. We require some changes in the government policies, collaborations, and above all the overall inclusion of ICT in education.”

Further to that there was a Corporate Presentation by Swati Samaddar, Regional Manager, North & East- Education Solutions, Adobe India.

### ***Leveraging Technology in Higher Education: Vision and Strategies***

Technology plays an inseparable and unavoidable impact on education and especially in higher education currently. Although the use of technology has revolutionised the sharing of information and knowledge in numerous fields, triggering the change in place around the world at an astounding rate, but it seems in many cases educational institutions are struggling to keep it up with the development around. Experts say that some of the reasons attributed to the hindrance are lack of resources and administrative focus, and improper evaluation programs. Therefore, the session was mostly focused on classroom technologies that can have a positive impact in educational institutions across the nation. It

also tried to highlight the role of the government in this direction and underscores the relevance of e-learning tools to increase access and provide quality education.

Moderator in this session was Rajen Varada, Resource Person, United Nation Solution Exchange (UNSE) and the eminent panelists were Dr B K Murthy, Director, Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Communications & Information Technology, Government of India Prof S V S Chaudhary, Vice-Chairperson, National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Prof A K Bakshi, Director, Institute of Life Long Learning, University of Delhi, Prof Z H Khan, Director, Centre for Information Technology, Jamia Millia Islamia and Dr S N Nandi, Associate, Quality Council of India.

Speaking in the context of higher education Dr. Murthy comments, “We need to bridge the gap between content and ICT. To create a larger National Knowledge Network, we are in the process of leveraging a high bandwidth connections to all the institutions in education, governance, telemedicine to be interconnected and intra-connected as well.”

While Prof Chaudhary quotes in saying, “The accessibility of ICT in education in India is still very poor. Besides, there is a dire need of a proper teachers' training in technology applications, otherwise we won't be able to get the best of the opportunities.”

According to Dr Nandi, Quality is the buzzword to meet the challenges in education and in that case quality analysis in the institutes and teaching-learning process is the must. In this point in time India should focus more into research and development to match up to the quality if global standards.

There were also a Corporate Presentation by Madan Padaki, Co-Founder and CEO, Merit Trac Services and thereafter by Raunak Singh Ahluwalia, Director, University18.

### ***Distance Education: Democratising the Dissemination of Quality Education***

The session was the need of the hour. The nation requires the access and spread of higher education as the opportunities of higher education is numerous in a country like India. Here comes the importance of distance education. In distance education, the main goal is to overcome barriers of place and time of the learners. They might live in isolated, rural areas and have no access to education or may already have access to a college, but that college might not offer the course of study needed by that learner. Distance learning meets all the gaps. It allows education to reach those who are not able to physically attend courses on a campus or increasingly facilities learners to participate at a time that is most suitable for their schedule.

But again, technology plays an important role here, while one is discussing about the reach and accessibility of education. The primary objective is to overcome the distance between the teacher and the learner. Through the application of technology, the teacher can prepare a particular lesson and send it to the learner, and the learner then can interact with the lesson and send feedback with questions, assignments, tests to the teacher.

Moderated by A.M. Thimmiya, Senior Vice President - Distributed Learning, Manipal Education, the session helps in establishing a detailed agenda of the future of distance learning in India. The panelists took part are Dr C K Ghosh,, Director, Student Service Centre, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Dr Sharat Kumar, Former Director, Institute of Management Technology (IMT) Dr Sunita Raju, Senior Chairperson and Professor, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), Dr Seema M Parihar, Deputy Dean, Central Placement Cell, University of Delhi and Dr Neeta Kapai, Deputy

Director, Campus Placement Cell, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

“Leveraging the quality of teachers in our current education system is a challenge. For that we need to change our mindset and Industry participation is a must in the process,” comments Thimmiya at the summit.

According to Dr Raju at IIFT, “We conduct courses both through classroom lectures and distance learning, a blended learning approach. We have tied up with NIIT Ltd and Hughes Communications for the purpose. We ensure that the distance classes get the same value added options the classrooms get. We also arrange to receive the feedbacks from the students and try evaluate it.”

### ***Technology Enabled Campus : Creating a Roadmap to Match Global Classrooms***

The session focuses on the emerging concept of campus technologies including use of Internet as well as the latest hardware and gadgets' applications to support student research and collaboration, to improve communication between instructors and students, for a better, fast and improved knowledge delivery.

The latest technologies imparted in the classrooms are learned to have profound effects in universities across the globe and India is witnessing the changes too. Not too far ago, global instructors had started to abandon traditional approaches of the teaching learning process, which said to have transferring knowledge from faculty to students in a much constrained and subjective manner. But for the cutting-edge strategies, which allow students to construct their own learning mooring them for their innovative ideas and bringing out solutions of critical situations, technology becomes inevitable in the process. And this change in the instructional strategy has also brought about a change in the tools which are used for the new method of teaching.

The session was meant for the educators that the process must be prepared to both understand and use of classroom technologies and application to the fullest. Universities, if aspiring to be in the global standard, to sustain in future in the competition, need to utilise campus infrastructure which should be designed to integrate a wide variety of technologies into the classroom, thereby making them entirely wireless and promoting various online learning tools.

The sessions was moderated by Seema Parihar and participated by Prof Rajiv Shorey, President, NIIT University, Brig (Dr) R S Grewal, Vice Chancellor, Chitkara University, Prof Sanjay Jasola, Dean, School of Information and Communication Technology, Gautam Buddha University and Dr P K Chaturvedi, Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Skyline Institute of Engineering and Technology.

“For us at NIIT University, technology is the focal point as we are concentrating on synchronous learning and technology enabled green campus. Students from their first year are equipped with netbooks and the campus is wi-fi enabled everywhere,” says Dr Shorey at NIIT.

### ***Online Examinations as a Part of IT Supported Examination Process Chain, Challenges and Opportunities***

In teaching learning process, by any means, examinations are a crucial part even in university's administration procedures. In that, ICT support in examinations and administration processes is fast catching up among the institutions today. It is of late that some higher education institutions have initiated the process of admission from paper-based examinations into a computer-based.

The reason behind is that, on-line and on-screen exams are supposed to reduce costs, and improve quality and speed of the correction process. However, integrating computer-based tests and assessments in the examination process chain brings about a lot of problems and challenges for both faculty and administrators. But the testing procedure ensures the hickles in a much smoother way.

Therefore, in an effort to bring about the best of on-line examinations, the session focused on the organisational and technological challenges that have to be met and thus brought out some of the experiences of the lessons learnt from the recent events.

Dr R P Singh, Vice Chancellor, Sharda University was the moderator of the session while the panelists were Madan Padaki, Co-Founder and CEO, MeritTrac Services, Prof Sudhi Ranjan Dey, Executive Director & Dean and Chairman, Academic Senate of IBMR Business School, Dr Sarabjit Singh, Principal, Apeejay College of Engineering and R Dharendra, CEO, Eduquity.

“In our institute we are now in a phase of transforming all exams into on-line mode. I am sure that most of the higher education institutes find it the best to do so. Therefore, my suggestion is that, students should get exposure to on-line admission and examination process from the pre-secondary level itself,” observes Prof Dey at IBMR Business School.

### ***Ushering in Virtual Learning Environment in Higher Education***

Like the Distance Learning, the demand and presence of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) is increasing in higher education institutions world over. There are case studies claiming that VLEs are more effective as a learning method than traditional classroom lecturing with the intervention of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) without the constraints of time and distance. Once students and lecturers have access to the web, VLEs would minimise the challenges in delivering lectures and the associated feedbacks from students inspite of their physical absence in lecture halls.

The session was aimed into addressing the suitability of a VLE for higher education in the country by comparing learning with a VLE and learning in a traditional lecture methods.

Moderated by Simi Kher, Country Coordinator, Tony Blair Faith Foundation, the panel had Major Gen S B Akali, Director, Global Institute of Healthcare Management, Raunak Singh Ahluwalia, Director, University18.

“We cannot be left untouched by the effects of ICT in education when we are talking global. ICT helps in delivering at the best possible way. ROI (Return On Investment) can also be measured with the help of it. Days are coming when ICT will be mobile based and things will be delivered in moments,” voices Dr Akali at Global Institute of Healthcare Management.