Editorial

Politics and Management of University Reforms

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Goal #4 of Sustainable Development Goals pertains to "Quality Education". United Nations holds that obtaining a quality education is the foundation to creating sustainable development. The access to inclusive education not only improves quality of life, it equips citizens to think of innovative solutions to world's greatest problems! Although much progress has been done towards increasing access to education at all levels and we can observe increase in school enrollment, still we are far from achieving universal education goals, especially some countries need to wake up and do their bit as we are left with hardly a decade to get it done by 2030. There may be reasons for this lagging behind the schedule: lack of adequately trained teachers, poor infrastructure and equity etc. "Delivering an education to all – and not just some children – is the civil rights struggle of our time", says Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education, and former UK Prime Minister (UNICEF, 2017). At the same event, Muzoon Almellehan (UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador) expressed, "If we don't take action on education now, we risk threatening progress and stability".

This calls for an urgent need of reforms in education. The World Development Report 2018: 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise' is already issuing warning of a 'learning crisis' in global education (The World Bank, 2017).

The World Bank suggests using information and metrics to mobilize citizens, increase accountability and having a political will-power for education reforms. This needs to be done at all stages from design to implementation. "Education reform is urgently needed and requires persistence as well as the political alignment of government, media, entrepreneurs, teachers, parents, and students. They all have to value and demand better learning", stresses Jaime Saavdera (a former Peruvian Education Minister, and now the World Bank's Senior Director for Education). He points out a sorry state for developing countries which are far from where they should be on learning. He further points out that it is not only money consideration, countries need to invest into capacity building and institutional strengthening as well.

Governments have adopted various kinds of reforms for educational development in their countries (Davoli and Entorf, 2018, Hannum et al., 2018, Huy, 2017). An 'Education Cannot Wait' (ECW) fund grant for supporting education in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Palestine (ECW, 2018), Convention on the recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher education in the European region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) of April 1997 further showcase efforts in this direction.

Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Poland introduced higher education reforms like effective assistance for students (new student loans, more places at free of charge studies, no charge for exams, cheaper travel tickets), more rights to students (legal security for students, professors for students), Work after studies, Flexible studies, more money for science, dynamic personnel policy, commercialisation of research results and incentives to create research spin-offs etc (Warsaw, 2011). Finland introduced major educational reforms in 1970s which led to improved equity of outcomes and increased quality to that extent that Finland grabbed first place in first PISA test in 2000. Similarly Peru, Chile, United Kingdom also introduced mechanisms to strengthen the foundations of learning and system-level reforms showed results. Focused school management and governance reforms have indicated improved teacher learner interaction in countries like Brazil, India, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States (Bloom et al., 2015).

This issue of Asian Journal of Distance Education focuses on the politics and management of university reforms. The contributions in this issue discuss about what strategies are being adopted around the world to cope and evolve. The aim is to provide contextual in-depth analysis to help universities make better informed decisions. This includes the efficiency of e-learning and OER / RLO for building human capacity and social capital. Other emerging aspects are transnational collaboration and how this functions in practice. This issue brings to you thirteen articles, two book reviews and one Focus Report.

Open Educational Resources (OER) are now an integral part of course design. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has invested over US$190 million in grants since 2001 to support institutions with the adoption of OER.

Established in 2009, the OER Foundation (OERF) coordinates a global network of institutions from five continents as OERu Network. It has recently approved an OERu Outreach Partnership Programme (OOPP), "a global charitable initiative of the OERu network, which seeks to widen access to open online learning materials for post-secondary learners for whom conventional higher education is out of reach for financial or access reasons". OOPP has special implications for Asian region with many countries having a 'developing world' tag. The Outreach Partnership Programme 'strives to support capacity development in open education, specifically fostering South-North knowledge-sharing with post-secondary providers that cannot afford the annual OERu innovation partnership membership fee' (OERu.org). John TRAXLER, in the opening article of this issue, discusses factors, possibilities and reform through using OER in Asia. He examines the factors that might promote or inhibit the transfer and re-use of OER into Asian higher education and particularly focuses on the issue of language and culture. He strongly recommends diffusion of innovation to achieve the adoption or assimilation of OER and Concerns-Based Adoption Model in Asian context.

Second article is by Ravneel Rajneel CHAND, Manpreet KAUR, and Priyatma SINGH highlighting how Course Based Research can promote reforms and active learning in higher education institutions. Besides providing an opportunity to reflect and build up, in practice, the research approach enabled students to collaborate and generate a deliverable in the form research publication. The students' interest in tackling real-life problems, particularly current environmental issues multiple disciplines, including climate change, biodiversity and conservation and natural resource management. The integration of these disciplines has enormous potential to improve student retention rate in the science stream.

Third article is about multimedia courseware as a means of reformations in open universities in which Gitali KAKATI, and Ankuran DUTTA examined the availability of the multimedia courseware in Open Universities of India and to understand the delivery mechanism of the multimedia courseware in different Open Universities of the country. As TRAXLER reported about OER in his study, here KAKATI and DUTTA also report that Open Universities of the country are gradually adopting Open Educational Resources (OER) as a platform to disseminate learning through open and free accessibility to all. Their recommendation, quite important for Asian region, is that using Multimedia technologies have the potential to turn the world into a smaller place to live in and can thus eliminate the gap between the learners and teachers, where the learners always face a kind of alienation from their teachers. This calls for providing an enabling environment for easy accessibility of the multimedia materials.

According to the Global Information Technology Report 2016, top five countries in the region in terms of overall ICT readiness remain China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, as in 2015 (WEF, 2016). If we see the mobile telephony, it is expected to pass the five billion mark by 2019 (Statista, 2018). In Asian region, China is expected to reach almost 1.5 billion mobile connection by 2019 while India to 1.1 billion. Popularity of smartphones has added fuel to this growth. Globally, in 2014, around 38 percent of all mobile users had smartphones which in 2018 is supposed to reach over 50 percent. Asia has the third-highest growth rate (11.4 %) globally after Latin America and Africa (Adkins, 2015). This high preference for mobile phones makes mobile learning as the very viable learning technology in these regions.

Next two articles discuss the power of mobile technologies towards university reforms. Steve WARNER investigates perceptions of students using WhatsApp mobile social learning in a blended Mathematics course, while Roy Rillera MARZO looks at Short Message Service (SMS) as an Innovative Mobile Learning Approach. WARNER studied the integration of WhatsApp with Moodle and finds it to be a refreshing and positive inclusion to the blended platform of the courses. MARZO examines the potential of Short Messaging Service (SMS) as a learner-centered technology, where the learners can access information anytime, anywhere in order to build their skills and knowledge. He recommends taking into consideration the pedagogical factors which affect the learning satisfaction of learners using mobile learning.

Juan-Carlos HERKEN-KRAUER, and Vukašin B. VASIĆ have an interesting take on the role of teacher as the modern sisphyus and note that the education industry relies to a large extent on a bona fide intangible capital, whereby the main actors, and the market, accept the final products, degrees and certified academic achievements at face value, as solid signals for the quality of human capital delivered, and therefore to avoid the "tragedy of the commons" we need a much broader and radical management approach, a new modus operandi to find a way-out leading to a new modus vivendi with other actors of education industry.

Seventh article by Sujata SANTOSH, and Jyotsna DIKSHIT details reforms through e-governance in open and distance learning system in India in crucial areas and initiatives such as implementation of enterprise resource planning solution, online admission system, national open and distance learners' library and information network. The authors recommend a strong policy and a vision paper on e-governance which will enable institutions to plan, develop and implement e-governance initiatives successfully.

They also note that distance education is not any more an option, rather a compulsion where institutions need to focus on developing human and infrastructure resources and capacities, essential for implementing E-governance strategically.

Bini TOMS, Jayashree KURUP, and Ranjita PANDA in their article, 'Student Selection in the Scenario of Democratization of Higher Open and Distance Education Reforms in India' have examined a very pertinent aspect of distance education students' performance. Traditionally we note that mostly the students who seek admission to ODL programmes are those who could not get enrolled into traditional and conventional system of education and thus they are already filtered and face certain challenges in assessment and have then low passing rate of such students. These authors have suggestions for this issue and recommend mechanism(s) for student screening on the basis of intelligence, competence, capability and self-motivation. They fear that democratization of education is actually being misinterpreted and is targeting mass enrolment and raise the hope that if self-learning is achieved in its true sense, then we can be assured that ODL system is effectively contributing to educational development of the country. This self-learning can attained by competent, self-motivated and select students.

Ebba OSSIANNILSSON, in the next article, discusses ecologies of openness and suggesting reformations through open pedagogy. She provides an overview of different current frameworks for open education. She discusses impact of works by European Commission, UNESCO and some scholars on open education. She recommends a holistic systemic approach including all micro, meso and macro levels to identify intersections and interstices for university reforms. There is a need to apply open leadership and developing a culture of openness in individuals, communities and society, because culture of openness and ecologies of open pedagogy is not an end in itself, rather an ongoing process.

Harish VENKATASUBRAMANIAN, Sudharani RAVINDRAN, and Mansurali ANIFA propose adoption of eBooks as a way of reformation in university education keeping in view the preferences of younger generation. They assure that adopting digital learning platforms will result in a better teaching learning process and insist on having a top down approach for its implementation.

P SATYANARAYANA, and Lakshmi MANTHA did a survey of research in distance education in India and studied different aspects of ODL to bring reforms based on those research results.

In the next article, Venkatesan RAMACHANDRAN, and S. KUPPUSAMY propose a framework for online communities of practice for reforms in distance learning. They try to establish that while use of social networking platforms for distance education has been recommended by researchers, mostly the academic community is slow in adopting those as mainstream technology, for example, using traditional LMSs. They hope that higher quality of content and higher quality platform would improve the perceived effectiveness of learning through social networking platforms.

The last article in this issue is by Kapil Dev SHARMA where he examines usage of ICT for reforms in management education through ODL. He is hopeful that the threats for management education through distance mode of learning may suitably be converted into opportunities by using technological advances and media mix.

This issue also features reviews of two books. Prof V S PRASAD is an internationally renowned expert and an authority on ODL. His book, "Higher Education and Open Distance Learning Trajectory in India: Reflections of an Insider" provides useful insights into best managing and reforming the higher distance education system in India.

Second book, "Open Distance Education in India: Expectation and Experience" is by Dr P SATYANARYANA and Dr C. SESHARATNAM, stalwarts who have been in the field of ODL for many decades and in fact emergence of ODL in India. They cover different facets of ODL, like origin, objectives, organization, courses and programmes, student enrollment, dropout, instructional system, use of technology, student support, staff development, open universities in India, weaknesses and deficiencies of ODL System, regulation of standards, need for national ODL policy, need for reforming ODL System etc. We are sure that these books will be useful and interesting to our readers who wish to understand Indian ODL system in greater details.

Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA) is a prominent body with membership from National, State Open Universities and Conventional Universities offering courses in dual mode, Agriculture Universities, Extended Educational Institutions and other Academic Institutions. J S DOROTHY present to you a report on the 22nd International Conference of Indian Distance Education Association (IDEA), which was hosted by School of Distance Learning and Continuing Education (SDLCE), Kakatiya University on 11 and 12 August 2018. The main theme of this conference was "Improved access to Distance Higher Education –focus on underserved communities and uncovered regions".

We look forward to your advice and guidance on themes Asian Journal of Distance Education would cover and enhancing the impact of distance and open education research with a special focus on Asia.

2019 is downing. 2018 is taking leave. We wish you the very best in your endeavours. Stay happy and healthy. Happy New Year!!

Enjoy reading the articles!

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